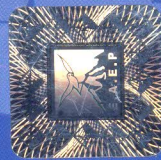


Peak Drama Series

Aminata

Francis Imbuga is not only a renowned Kenyan play-wright, but he is also an actor who has performed in many plays both on stage and on television. He was the recipient of the inaugural Kenya National Academy of Sciences Distinguished Professional Award in Play Writing for 1986. Among his other published plays are *The Burning of Rags*, *Game of Silence*, *The Successor*, *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, all published in the E.A.E.P. Drama Library.

Aminata was first published in 1988 after a successful world premiere at the Kenya National Theatre in 1985. Aminata, a brilliant, diligent and benevolent young lawyer is an acclaimed village celebrity. Yet there are those who will see her only as a woman first and everything else afterwards. To assert her human dignity, she has to passionately resist anachronisms that have warped an otherwise fast changing society.



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Aminata

Francis Imbuga



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THE LADY OF THE LAKES



The Lady of the Lakes - A story of the life of a woman who was born in the year 1800 and died in the year 1850. The story is told in a simple and straightforward manner, and is suitable for reading by all ages. The story is set in the year 1800, and is a story of a woman who was born in the year 1800 and died in the year 1850. The story is told in a simple and straightforward manner, and is suitable for reading by all ages.

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AMINATA

THE LADY OF THE LAKES

The E.A.E.P. Drama Library

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Aminata

a play by

Francis Imbuga



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Characters

Jumba Headman of Membe.
Nuhu An elder of Membe, also a mason.
Ndururu A mason.
Mbaluto Jumba's only surviving child. He is mute.
Mama Rosina Jumba's wife.
Agege Master of odd jobs.
Ababio Jumba's nephew, a drunk.
George Mulemi A medical researcher.
Kezia Mulemi's Auntie.
Aminata Mulemi's wife. Jumba's niece.
Ngoya The memory of a dead pastor.
Mildambo A village elder.
Amata A village elder.
Lorna A choreographer.
Abade The oldest man alive in Membe.
Elders of the stool
A crowd
Dancers

Place: The village of Membe and its environs.
Time: The action in this play cuts right across the confines of time.

Aminata was commissioned by the steering committee of the United Nations Decade for Women Conference which was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 1985. The play had its world premiere at the Kenya National Theatre on 16th July 1985, with the following cast:

Jumba	Paul Onsongo	Crowd	Sophie Muchunu
Nuhu Rabala ..	Kitheka Mutui		Francis Imbuga
Ndururu	Wakanyole		Martin Kimotho
Mama Rosina ..	Ann Wanjugu		Mathengani
Agege	Asiba Asiba		
Ababio	Polycarp Shiakha	Produced by	Greg Adambo
Mulemi	William Tsuma	Directed by	Tirus Gathwe
Kezia	Catherine Kariuki		Wanjiku Mwotia
Aminata	Ruth Kamau	Stage manager ...	Frank Kimoho
Ngoya	David Mulwa		
Amata	Mark Oenga		
Lorna	Emily Muriuki		

PART ONE

Scene One

(Imprisonment of A Shadow)

Early morning. Village noises fill the air as the curtain opens on a small cemetery. In the background, running right across the stage, is the wall of a modern church. In front of the wall are several graves randomly situated. Nuhu, Ndururu and Mbaluto have just completed cementing the newest grave and are now busy cleaning the tools of their trade. Jumba stands a little farther away from the masons, his eyes critically glued to the new grave. Satisfied with a job well done, he nods his head approvingly and walks towards Nuhu.

Jumba: Nuhu, son of Rabala!

Nuhu: Speak Jumba, my ears are for the headman of Membe's words.

Jumba: This is truly the work of an old hand. The name of whoever trained you should be preserved in song.

Nuhu: Thank you headman. Our composers should have been here to hear you say that.

Jumba: Yes, indeed. This is a job perfectly done.

Nuhu: Your late brother deserves it. He was Membe's glow-worm in gone days.

Jumba: (*Absent-minded.*) Yes, Membe's glow-worm in days gone. (*Recovering*) I am sure his shadow is more than pleased with it.

Rosina: (*Entering*) Pleased? Did I hear you say, pleased? Jumba, my husband, why do you deafen your ears against my words? What worms block your ears when I speak?

Jumba: Worms? (*Clears his ears with index fingers.*) What worms?

Rosina: (*Determined to make her point*). The church people, did you inform them?

Jumba: The church people had their turn, Mama Rosina. They buried their man and left. This is only a little family matter.

Rosina: Only a little family matter! My husband, Ngoya was your brother, true, but he was also a Pastor of the Church. Do you now call the dressing of his grave, a little family matter? Ngoya was not only a Membe, no! He was a man of God. Remember that the sweetness of sugar is not in its colour.

Jumba: We are all men of God.

Rosina: Men of God, yes, but your brother was more than that. He was the first of our people to join the Church. He grew up and served the Church without ever looking back. In return, they recognised his devotion to God and to the Church, and they rewarded him, made him pastor Pastor Eliakim Ngoya. That name is sweet music to the ears of many here and beyond. I say once more that in agreeing to bury your brother here, you were shaking hands with the Church. You should have informed them of this work. A song or two and a short prayer to bless the occasion, that is all they would have asked for. (*Turns to Nuhu*) Nuhu, son of Rabala, you are an elder of Membe, what is this hurry for?

Nuhu: Mother of people...

Rosina: (*Hurt*) Mother of people? Go on, scoff at me. Let the whole world know that mine is a cold house!

Nuhu: A slip of the tongue, Mama Rosina, I meant no harm. A mouth may lack teeth, but it is a mouth still. I mean, your house was once full. Besides, Mbaluto here is very much a...

Rosina: Stop it! (*Pause*) Which of your two feet is stronger? The one that goes to Church or the one that dances with Membe's elders of the stool?

Now you accuse me unfairly. I may be Nuhu but I am also Rabala. I have never locked horns with the Church.

And if the father of you... I mean your husband here, if he had not misled us, I would have been the first to close my eyes in prayer before we began this work.

You have offended the dead.

(*Supplicating*) Forgive us.

Enough of this female talk!

I am quiet. (*To his fellow masons.*) You two, follow me.

We will need some banana leaves to cover it with. (*They leave Rosina and Jumba alone.*)

Mama Rosina, what am I in this village?

You are my husband.

What else am I?

Headman.

Good. Now as headman am I or am I not empowered to make decisions on behalf of Membe?

A wise man fills his ears before he empties his mouth.

(*Upset*) Go on, abuse me! Abuse your husband in front of his late brother's wet grave! Where were you born?

It was only a saying.

Only a saying? What do you know about sayings?

Bad temper, that is all.

Mama Rosina, I will have you understand that there is more to this grave-dressing than is fit for women's ears.

The tortoise may be slow, but he seldom falls.

(*Shocked at her forgetfulness*) What have I just told you? Where are your ears?

In time you will discover that my ears and eyes are all yours. Why do you turn your brother enemy in death?

Those are your words. Go and ask Ababio why he chose to have his father's grave dressed without consulting the

Church. You will find, in time, that he had a good reason for it.

Rosina: What good reason? Jumba, be your age. Is such a decision to be left in the trembling hands of a good-for-nothing drunk?

Jumba: Mama Rosina, it is not fitting that you and I should log horns over this matter. Ababio is my late brother's eldest son. Now if he wants his father's grave cemented on Friday, a Saturday or a Sunday, who am I to stop him? You are his uncle and headman of Membe, and he is drunk. A good-for-nothing drunk. *(Pause.)* My husband the passing wind is full of people's whispers. Some of them think they know why the grave had to be dressed in a hurry. Their fingers are pointed at you.

Jumba: Women's talk. I have grown up with it. Ababio may be drunk, but he is still Ngoya's eldest son, and the decision was his.

Rosina: If what they say is true, then you are wrong Jumba, very wrong. Ngoya was a born-again Christian. His shadow is not beneath that weight of brick and cement. Fulfill his dying wishes and all will be well.

Jumba: What are you talking about?

Rosina: Your late brother's dying wishes. Was it not Pastor Ngoya's wish that his grave should not be cemented?

Jumba: How am I to know? Have you been talking to the dead Aminata's messenger is not dead.

Rosina: Aminata's messenger?

Rosina: Yes, she heard rumours of your intentions and sent a messenger too late.

Jumba: *(Almost to himself.)* It was her father's fault, confiding in a daughter when he had a brother and sons.

Rosina: Do you so speak of the dead?

Jumba: Yes, Aminata cannot now come to teach us how to

manage the affairs of Membe. No, I will not let her. Mama Rosina, we sacrificed our blood and all in the name of Ngoya's new religion. Aminata was part of that evil. What more does she want from me? If she knows what is good for her, she had better wait until I am dead and gone.

Poor you, perhaps you are already dead and gone.

Hmm?

The coffin!

What?

The coffin! Have you forgotten the saying?

Be careful Mama Rosina, lest I stick a saying in your throat.

He that would bury his dead provides a coffin. Pastor Ngoya had sons, and in you he had a brother, but all of you male heads let his daughter buy him a coffin. Was that in keeping with our ancestor's laws? No one here can deny that Aminata buried her father. Yes, the weaker sex buried an elder of Membe. You refused to listen to me then as you do now. So what happened? Aminata, a daughter of Membe, buried Pastor Ngoya.

Aminata may have bought a coffin for her father, but that does not make her a woman of Membe. No, she is a married woman with a home of her own, a husband and children to look after. What does she want here? How many times have you yourself gone back to your father's clan to bandy words with elders there?

If I went back there, I would not lack ears for my words. And that is all that Aminata wants, ears for her words. When she and the city-people brought water to the door-steps of Membe's homes, was she acting as a stranger or a child of Membe? You offered them a bull, didn't you?

That was before my eyes were opened.

And when she and her husband were roaming from

hospital to hospital with their sick father where was your nephew, Ababio? Or had he suddenly forgotten that he was Ngoya's eldest son?

Jumba: Ababio's drinking problem should not be used to deny him his rightful position in our family.

Rosina: What is there between him and Mbaluto to choose from? Now that is enough!

Rosina: Enough? No, it isn't. I came to talk!

Jumba: That is enough, I said. Let us leave the remains of my brother to rest in peace.

Rosina: Oh, so now you understand that the dead need their peace of mind too? Yes, take heed my husband, the dead see through walls. They see well beyond their graves.

Jumba: There, there! I knew it. Threats of a shadow, Ababio and I knew that sooner or later it would come to this. Threat of a shadow. Yes, we had to be sure. Absolutely sure. Thank you, Mama Rosina. You are the first one to threaten us with my late brother's reappearance.

Rosina: In me, you have no scapegoat, Jumba. Your brother's peace of mind is in your hands and your own peace of mind in his.

Jumba: That is not new, Mama Rosina. My memory, it seems, is my disease, and yours your consolation. Night after night, the cries of the little ones fill the air. Oh, how I wish we had dressed their little graves before they learnt to live our lives. But this time, I wasn't going to take any chances. No, not me.

Rosina: My husband, your thoughts are your disease. Forget that day of the red bird and let us put our future in God's hands.

Jumba: No more talk. Leave me alone! The ground around a man's grave is for men's feet!

Rosina: Very well then, I am on my way, but remember that a

messenger sits in your compound.

Jumba: Yes. I shall remember. *(Rosina exits as the masons enter, carrying green banana leaves.)* Nuhu and Ndururu, on whose side are you?

Nuhu: On whose side?

Nuhu: Yes.

Well, you can see for yourself that we are on the side of the dead.

Do not swell my head with your many sided words. You know well that Aminata is not dead.

I speak of her father, headman. The matter of you and your late brother's daughter will be decided by Membe's elders.

If Membe's elders have decided to fight against their ancestors, then may the red bird strike them the way it struck my children.

Eech, headman, guard your mouth. Remember you are the carrier of Membe's stool of rule. A curse from you is a curse from the sky.

Spittle in the sand! Membe's stool of rule is spittle in the sand without the devotion of the elders.

That may be true but.... *(Enter Agege in tatters.)* Ah, at last!

Too much fire! *(Notices the transformed grave.)* You see, you see, you see! Headman, how do you see now? Too much fire! That is what I say, always. A grave? No problem. Get cement proper, add water plus sand, *basi koroga, koroga*, together all! Result? Long lasting *permananet* grave, finish!

Stop that ranting, you idiot. I was talking to men.

Men? And me? Me you call woman? Too much fire! Alright show me breast of woman on my body now. Show.

Jumba: I sent you to call Ababio. Where is he?

Agege: Ababio is in drink ...

Jumba: Did you pass my message to him?

Agege: No, they chase me through backdoor, so I am here. They say drink place not fit for village idiot.

Jumba: You go back there and ask Ababio to come. The worker want their pay.

Agege: No, now I am for refuse completely.

Jumba: You have refused to go?

Agege: Yes, after thinking careful thought.

Jumba: What careful thought?

Agege: This, that if you call me idiot, why send me also? And also you call me woman in addition. Idiot and woman double. So I say, two plus two is four, and I refuse.

Jumba: Agege, listen. Do you remember what I promised you two days ago? (*Agege nods affirmatively.*) What?

Agege: New shirt and trouser with no lice.

Jumba: Now do you want them or not?

Agege: I do.

Jumba: What about the messenger's job?

Agege: Messenger of stool?

Jumba: Yes, *Banyako* Agege, messenger of the stool. Do you want it or not?

Agege: I do, but I am still obedient to refuse. Everyday, everyday Agege do this, Agege do that. Even in middle of dark night, Agege do this. Now I refuse, because even idiot need rest. Yes, all man is equal. Even me I am equal also. And some women too are equal also. Yes, like Aminata is equal than Ababio because she bring water.

Jumba: Shut up you porcupine!

Agege: Porcupine? Now that is double twice. Idiot, then woman then the porcupine also. Call me anything but my mouth

is for truth. Aminata is equal than Ababio. Me also. Aehe, too much fire! Everyday, everyday, Agege light fire, Agege cut grass. Agege dig grave, Agege fetch water.

Every morning, Agege feed dog, Agege feed cow, Agege feed hen! Why? I am not machine without bloodless! Even machine drink petrol also. So, from today now I am for respect me and I respect you back.

Jumba: Am I hearing right? Agege, what did you have for your morning meal?

Agege: Morning meal? Me I don't eat to talk. I talk to eat.

Jumba: You will starve yourself to death with this kind of talk, you toad. (*An idea strikes Jumba. He extracts a coin from his pocket and hands it to Agege who literally snatches it away from him.*) Are you happy now?

Agege: Yes, but not much, much. Aminata give me five of these at burial. Five! That mean full stomach in future.

Jumba: Alright, go and call Ababio. The workers want to return to their homes. Tell him that.

Agege: (*After a little hesitation.*) Alright, okay, I go. On your marks, get set, gooo! (*He takes off at full speed but stops almost immediately. Slowly, thoughtfully he turns and walks back to where Jumba is.*)

Jumba: What is the matter now?

Agege: Two matters. One, surely why should must I go again? (*Pause.*) The second one is advice.

Jumba: Advice? What advice?

Agege: Too much fire! You know, people call me village idiot, grave digger and many other. But they are foolish in their head themselves. (*Jumba fidgets.*) No, not you. You, you are headman with good equal head. Even me, I am equal with six sense here. (*Fingering his head.*)

Jumba: (*Losing his patience.*) Agege, listen, I sent you to call Ababio!

Agege: I know, but still two matters. First, dead Ngoya is father of Ababio. Second, today is grave cement day. So me I have one question. Why is Ababio in drink place? You see, because of that, me I say, Ababio is village idiot instead for me. I say also that Aminata is first son born of Pastor Ngoya.

Jumba: Imbecile!

Agege: Imbecile? Alright, too much fire! But my mouth is for truth. Just think now, now, Ababio finish all money in drink. What is he to pay?

Jumba: Who has been filling your crazy head with this Aminata talk? Mama Rosina?

Agege: No.

Jumba: Who then?

Agege: Deeds.

Jumba: Who?

Agege: Deeds of her own, her doings.

Jumba: That is enough. Go call Ababio.

Agege: But what is he to pay? (*To the masons.*) You are fools! also. You should wait for Aminata when she come next. Then she give you proper pay for *permanganent* work full pocket each one.

Jumba: Agege, return my money. I will send someone else.

Agege: Which someone else? (*Pause.*) On your marks, get set gooo! (*He dashes off.*)

Nuhu: His words do not smell of the idiot you people say he is.

Jumba: Whose words? Do you think that parrot understands what he is talking about? (*Pause.*) What charms has that woman used on us that even crazy heads sing her praise as they blindly walk away from our roots? Nuhu, what became of Membe's sons? We once stood firm as men on our two feet, erect, our heads held high, sniffing proudly at the passing wind for enemy scent. What

became of that blood of courage that once filled our veins?

Nuhu: The bitterness of past events can blur our vision of today's realities. Forget the past and accept the face of a little change.

Jumba: The face of a little change! (*Pointing to Mbaluto.*) Look at him, is he your idea of change?

Nuhu: Headman, when a village child drowns in the raging waters of a swollen river, do the villagers stop drinking water?

Ndururu: Those are wise words, son of Rabala. You have spoken well.

Jumba: Wise words, are they? Wisdom. What is wisdom, Ndururu? (*Pause.*) Tell me, have you ever seen a man die wisely?

Ndururu: Now, I thought we were... er... no, I mean I haven't. Nuhu, have you?

Nuhu: Caution is wisdom and wisdom, strength. Be strong headman, a lion does not challenge a mouse to a duel.

Jumba: Son of Rabala, that woman is no mouse. She is a tigress. No, a witch! A hot blooded witch that would devour her own brood.

Nuhu: A witch? You will have to show us the children whom Aminata has orphaned first, before you call her a witch. Show us the women whom she has widowed and we shall respect your word against hers.

Jumba: Nuhu, are you a stranger here? Have you not stopped to wonder how she has survived the numerous curses that have been hurled upon her head? How come none of the curses has caught up with her?

Ndururu: Curses against Pastor Ngoya's daughter? Maybe seeds have germinated in my ears. Eeh, who in Membe would dare raise a curse against Aminata?

Jumba:

Go on then, be fooled. Let her generosity blind you. Let the *degreed* wick drink her fill from your ignorance. She will find me stronger yet. What! Shall we just sit and watch as she knocks wedges between us and our womenfolk? Nuhu, is it women's gossip that Aminata drove away Ababio's wife?

Nuhu:

Ababio did not get married to a child. That woman has mind of her own. How could Aminata possibly drive her away?

Jumba:

The ways of a witch are many, but she is deceived if she thinks she is fighting me. No one fights our laws of age and lives.

Nuhu:

In what way is Aminata fighting our laws of ages?

Jumba:

Now hear him. (*Sarcastic.*) Words from the lips of an elder of Membe! Yes, that is our plight, eating each other's words while the ground is stolen from under our very feet. Nuhu, do you want us all to follow their shadows of religion?

Nuhu:

I only asked a question.

Jumba:

Even the stiff-necked leopard knows the world around him. Must I thrust Aminata's evil deeds under your very nose before you can see them? Tell me, on that day when women tore at each other's breasts in their fight for chicken's heads, who was it who first tasted the soup? Was it not Ammata?

Ndururu:

But she was only a child then.

Jumba:

Only a child, yes, but where did she get the courage from? Some of our women took to their heels, didn't they? What made Aminata accept the bowl? Ndururu, when that tree fell and I lost all that made me man, who was it who survived the tragedy? Aminata! We pleaded with my late brother to have her cleansed, didn't we? So what happened? Nothing! Only the Church mattered then, and it had to be protected from primitive rituals. The man God would not bow to heathen ways. That was my

Jumba:

brother, the pastor of the new wisdom. Ndururu, the bitterness of it all sits deep in my heart. A heart that was once big enough to accept the challenges of change.

Nuhu:

The tragedy of the red bird and the tree was a thing from the sky.

That much I will not deny. But this church is evil. Aminata is evil too. That is why she escaped unscathed. When I think back, I curse myself for the part that I played in welcoming the robed strangers here. I was a foolish young man, all ears and no brains. Attracted by the toy with the tag of God on it. But now, now I am wiser. My dreams are full of the same thoughts, Aminata is evil. She is Membe's black sheep. A sheep long recognised by those that would destroy the very foundation of our ways of ages.

Nuhu:

We may have a black sheep in Membe, but you know, in your own heart, that Aminata is not that sheep.

Jumba:

Then you should not be here. Why did you agree to work on the grave against her wishes?

Nuhu:

It is only now that I hear of wishes. "Do you have time old man, we wish to cement the Pastor's grave tomorrow." That was Ababio. And naturally I was delighted to be here. This is the final rite and I wanted to offer my hands and my skills. But had I known of Pastor Ngoya's wish, I would not be here now.

Jumba:

Beware Nuhu, our ancestors are red-eyed when they run out of patience. In one fateful moment I sacrificed myself all to religion and this new wisdom of change. (*Points at Mbaluto.*) There, there is evidence of the remains of that evil. The silent mockery of a son. What else will you have me sacrifice?

Nuhu:

The evil spirits that live among us are not few. We should be grateful that Mbaluto and Aminata returned to us from that tragedy. It was an accident, and we can't always explain these things. None of us knows why the church

people chose that very spot for their church. Neither Ngoya nor Aminata planted that tree where the church would later be built. Just think, why did the children decide to shelter under the tree when their house was only a stone's throw away?

Jumba: Nothing but blood washes away the tears of an offended spirit. That tree was our ancestors' resting place. It was sacred because it grew at the very spot where Membe the father of our clan, was circumcised. The stories that our master narrators tell were composed under that tree. What amount of tolerance then would stop the gone from taking their revenge? And as if felling the tree was no insult enough, Ngoya began that equality nonsense among our womenfolk. Now they actually believe we are equal!

Nuhu: I still do not understand your fear, headman.

Jumba: Fear? I have none. Just remember that Membe will not be sold away to strangers while I sit on the stool of rule. What! A daughter of ours, a woman, to come and inherit land here?

Nuhu: But if it is true about the will then...

Jumba: Will or no will, I say it shall not happen in my time! If it happens, then may leprosy send me to my grave.

Nuhu: Headman, shouldn't you wait and hear the other elders' opinion before you speak with such finality?

Jumba: The headman's mind is made up. We shall make no more mistakes in Nyarango's family. We erred when we allowed Aminata and the church to bury Ngoya in this lonely ground instead of laying him in his own homestead.

Ndururu: Yes, that is truth itself. Ngoya was buried like a man without a home. Not even a calf was near to bless the clan with a shower of dust from his grave.

Jumba: I became the laughing stock of my fellow headmen from

the neighbouring clans. And that was Aminata's last victory here.

Nuhu: Why have you not called the land circle of elders to resolve the matter of the will?

Jumba: The elders of the land circle shall be called in time. I only opened the door of my mind to you as my partner on the day of our manhood. From you, the knife came to me, unwiped.

Nuhu: Call a meeting of the elders of the stool and let them fulfil Ngoya's dying wishes.

Jumba: You seem to have made up your mind already?

Nuhu: I have. Aminata and her husband will not come to settle among us, just because they happen to own a little piece of land here. No, they ought to know better than that. Mind you, it need not be a public handover.

Jumba: Quietly, yes. But I know she will insist on a formal public handover. That woman is as stubborn as a he-goat on heat.

Nuhu: Give it a chance.

Jumba: She won't hear of it, I tell you. She is like the egret that pulls ticks from a bull's back and thinks it is eating the bull. A terrible schemer. A terrible schemer. I know she will have nothing to do with a private handover.

Nuhu: I wouldn't call it scheming. Headman, Aminata is straight, and our people respect and adore her for what she has done for them. Her father loved her too. Now, if in his will, the pastor left her a small piece of land, why should we diarrhoea over it? After all Pastor Ngoya was a level headed man most times. And who knows? There may be another project for our women on the way.

Jumba: What project? To fool whom? Nuhu, that woman conspired with her father to slap Membe in the face and embarrass me and the stool of rule. Yes, she wants to use that thing she calls law to strangle our ways of ages. The

blame sits on her father's head. He came, planted new religion in our women's heads and manured it with their ignorance. Do you not remember his return to the city people? Do you not remember how he stood talking for hours on end, poisoning our women's heads with his new wisdom?

Ndururu: He spoke a great deal of truth.

Jumba: *(Reflective.)* A great deal of truth! Whose? His! His truth. What about mine? The other side of the coin? What about my truth? I lost it, didn't I? Yes, I lost them all. Punishment from our people, long gone. The blame is on my head too. I should have shunned that second knife. It was a difficult decision, at the time, and you were alone. Only Nuhu here resisted the temptation.

Nuhu: No, my case was different. We had just buried the mother of my children. And a new one would need children her own. That is how I escaped the second knife.

Jumba: Ngoya brought that madness here. He blinded us, and like moths, we all trooped towards the new light. The warmth of a single blanket and a bumpy ride around the village did it all. No sane man in Membe can forgive him for what he led us into. Why then is Aminata's husband preaching that same message of extinction? The evil Aminata must have entered his mind. That is why he busy deceiving innocent heads with that same madness. Headman, how many times will you be reminded that yours was an accident? If the red bird had struck different homestead, you would not be saying these things that you now fill the air with, would you?

Jumba: Wouldn't I? Oh Yes, I would, and may my next mouthful choke me if this be a lie. It was Ngoya's invitation of the city people which brought about our misfortune. Yes, it was his invitation of the city people which gave birth to the Aminatas of today. Women who rush into their beds without a single four legged gift from the

husband's people. Napkin sweat. Is that too much to expect? If it had not been for Ngoya, those chanting parasites would never have found their way here. Now see how they shamelessly trample down the seeds of our ways of ages.

Nuhu: Careful, headman, careful, do not spit at the faces of God's people. Remember the egret and the ticks on the bull's back. Calmness is the best cure for a disturbed mind.

Jumba: "The cure of the mind", sweet scented words without a meaning. Nuhu, "The cure of the mind," is a piece of hair lost in a sea of sand. There is no such cure for me; so let the cancerous thoughts do their worst. The memories have defied time and become clearer. A strange illness. I see him everyday, sometimes, twice. A flash, a shadow in front of my eyes, then the white robe. He stands there, shamelessly sowing seeds of discord among our womenfolk. Mama Rosina calls it madness. She thinks I am crazy. But I say, no. No one can deceive the eye in the heart. The inner eye that is forever focused on that day of the chicken soup. I see him clearly, sharply... *(The image of Pastor Ngoya, dressed in a white robe appears as gospel music fills the air. The impression created is one of a large crowd of people singing. The singing stops and Pastor Ngoya, who appears to be on a dais, addresses the congregation. From his gestures and mannerisms, it should be clear that he is not alone on the dais.)*

Ngoya: In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I repeat that this is the ultimate truth. In the eyes of the Lord, we are all equal. All children of God created in His own image from the same clay. Why then do we fight amongst ourselves? Know we not that we have greater enemies in ignorance, hunger and disease? Our mission here, as has been demonstrated by my brother, the Right Reverend Abu-Steiner, is as clear as the rain water that falls freely from the skies. God meant us for life. We must therefore walk into the future with only

those children that will make our tomorrow worth looking forward to. I agree with Reverend Abu-Steiner that every fourth child in every family should be seen as an extra mouth. A mouth to feed, a mouth to stop crying and a mouth to give medicine to. To achieve this harmony, God meant us for, there has to be total unity among us. Remember that a divided house neither knows comfort of peace nor the warmth of love. A man needs peace, he needs the comfort and warmth of love. What about a woman? Does she need any less love and peace?

Voices:

Noo!

Ngoya:

So tell me now, you proud mothers of our land. Is there any woman here present whose stomach is different from mine?

Voices:

Noo!

Ngoya:

Is there?

Voices:

Noo!

Ngoya:

Allelujah! Girl, boy, man, woman, where is the difference? (Pause.) It is all in our minds. Yes, your minds. God gave us plants, He gave us birds and fish and He gave us animals to grace our environment. Nowhere, in His Holy Book is it said, "This plant is for women, this bird for men and this fish for children" there?

Voices:

Noo!

Ngoya:

Allelujah! (Pause.) You cook the meals, don't you?

Voices:

Yes!

Ngoya:

Then why is it taboo for you to eat from the same bowl from which your menfolk eat? Why? (Pause.) The truth my dear sisters, is that your menfolk have been foolish you over the years. The weakness is in your minds, not in the lies that men tell. And remember my dear sisters, that the seed that germinates in a weak mind is the seed of fear and despair. That is why this is a historical

day, the day of the great challenge. Shall we break away from the taboos that have continually denied us the benefit of a full life or shall we trace our footsteps of fear and ignorance to the dark past? That, my dear sisters, is the question and my challenge to you. To break away or stay still, rooted to the same spot? That is why today, the church is pleased to offer you the symbol of all that has been denied you to this day, chicken.

Chicken?

Yes, chicken. Today our church has slaughtered enough chickens to be tasted by all the strong willed among you. Remember as you make up your mind that tradition is only good when it flowers and bears fruit. But it is a barren tradition that imprisons the very soul that gave birth to it. That is why today, my very own daughter, Aminata Maira Ngoya, will fill in the gap that was left by her mother, Abigail Monica Ngoya. Today Aminata becomes the first of Membe's womenfolk to taste the church's chicken soup, in public. (Prolonged clapping and ululations.)

A second garden of Eden. No good could possibly come out of this.

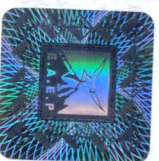
And now, as the chicken is passed round, shall we join our voices in that song of courage, that song of victory, "We shall overcome". (He starts the song and is joined by other voices. Suddenly several women enter talking excitedly, each in her own language. They devour large chunks of chicken as they talk. Just as suddenly, Agege, much younger, sets upon them, fighting desperately for a piece of chicken. Defeated, he stops trying and stands, isolated from the women, panting and disappointed.)

I am going to cry.

Cry!

I will cry!

Go on, cry!



Agege: You go make a man cry!

Women: You cry. (*Quite unexpectedly, Agege begins to wail. The women are greatly touched. Each offers her own child to Agege who soon has his hands full.*)

Agege: (*Apologetic.*) I warned you. I am a man.

Women: (*In chorus.*) We can see that! We can see the bridegroom (*One of them leads the rest in mock wedding song.*)

Soloist: Sili! Waal!

Women: Aa sili!!

Soloist: Sili! Waal!

Women: Aaa sili! Sili!!

Soloist: Agege!

Women: Aaa sili! Sili! (*Agege exits, still carrying the piece of chicken in his hands. The women follow him, singing.*)

Jumba: That is where my brother went wrong. But we shall ourselves stumble and fall just because our brother stumbled and fell. No, we shall stand firm and shi Membe from further shame. But if the elders of the shi shy away from their responsibility, then I shall protect the wishes of our forefathers single-handedly. Yes, calf that is orphaned scratches its own back. (*Ababio's drunken voice can be heard singing a dirge, apparently in honour of his late father.*)

Ndururu: He is coming.

Jumba: Hmm?

Ndururu: He is coming.

Jumba: Who?

Ndururu: Listen. (*Pause.*) Is that not Ababio's voice?

Jumba: Yes, it is him alright. The crowd is beyond salvation. (*Ababio staggers in. He stops singing and surveys the surrounding area suspiciously. Finally, he dismisses the environment with a tired wave of the hand.*)

Ababio: They can say whatever they want to say. Let them talk.

So what? Land is not a degree. Degrees? Useless! They can collect all the degrees in the world, if they want, but let nobody touch my land. For as long as I am still steady on my feet, no woman will touch my father's land because that is my land! A will? What is a will? Zero! And that school fees nonsense is zero also. Zero! Did I ask her to pay my children's fees? No, never! Now let me tell you something. That school fees nonsense was an arrangement between two women, my wife Misiah, and Aminata. I don't meddle in women's affairs. No, I don't. Yaa, so what were those drunkards talking about? Zero! Aeheh, some people don't know how to talk when they are drunk. The wishes of the dead! Since when did the dead start having wishes? *Ghasid!* What do they know about our home? Zero, I tell you, zero! (*He has now moved close enough to notice Jumba and the masons. He is a little embarrassed.*) Uncle, Uncle, I told them to their face. Yes, drunkards, useless drunkards! I told them to head for hell. (*Laughs a little but stops suddenly when he notices the disgust on Jumba's face.*) Uncle, what is the matter? Do you think I am drunk? No, you are wrong. I only tasted. First Timothy, Chapter five, verse twenty three: "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake." (*His attention is attracted by the grave.*) Hey, beautiful work, beautiful work! Now, now, now, now, wait a minute. Where, in the name of all Christians, is the cross facing? (*Silence.*) Uncle! Uncle! Headman!

Jumba: Speak.

Ababio: Have I offended you? I mean, I only asked, soberly, why the cross is facing this way.

Jumba: Where do you want it to face?

Ababio: (*Embarrassed but determined to go through it.*) A good question! A very good question! (*To the audience.*) You

see, never argue with a professional, people might not see the difference. Son of Rabala, I respect you. Ndu, it's true, I mean it. Nuhu here is a great man. A jack trades. He can cement graves and things, go to church with elders and drink a little, all in one stride! Watch your tongue, Ababio, you have your own age to insult.

Ababio: Alright, I know I can't win here. The best is a draw, it is true, I respect you.

Nuhu: Thank you. As you can see, the job is done, what is our pay.

Ababio: Your pay is no problem. No problem at all. But are sure you have put the final touches?

Nuhu: What else would you like us to do?

Ababio: Well, to start with, I trust that you know whose this is.

Nuhu: Ababio, my men want their pay.

Ababio: Okay, okay, but you should remember that this pastor's grave, and that pastor was my father.

Nuhu: So?

Ababio: Logical! Logical! It must be perfectly polished, you well-done. A befitting gift from a first born son. What I was driving at. Let the doubting Thomases and see for themselves, that I, Ababio, have a permanent place of rest for my father, with my own tomb. This is getting too far. Give us our pay.

Ababio: Patience, brother, patience!

Ndururu: No, give me my money and let me go. You know married to the devil herself. She won't believe been here all this time.

Ababio: Hen-pecked, that's what I call it. You have spoiled
Ndururu: So what do you want me to do? Beat her up even if she opens her mouth?

Ababio: I speak from experience brother, many years' experience. A little slap on the cheek can work miracles.

Ndururu: You may be right, but what have you to show for your little slaps on the cheek? Where is Misiyah?

Ababio: Now don't hit below the belt brother, don't hit below the belt. Misiyah is on compulsory leave.

Ndururu: Now you better pay us quickly or that devil of mine will send me on compulsory leave. I don't even know why I agreed to come.

Ababio: Relax man, relax. What are you wetting your pants for? What you need is to understand the psychology of women. That way you can outwit any number of them, all the Aminatas included. Do you know how I tricked her with that coffin business? I wanted to prove a point, so I decided to take her for a ride. I said to her..., I said, "Sister, I am dry. Please come to my rescue. Can you afford Mzee's coffin?" My God, that did it! It was as if she had been expecting it all along. Within an hour, the coffin was there! Now have you ever known such cut-throat competition? Such deadly ambition?

Ndururu: Headman, you ask this man to pay me. That is all I am asking for.

Jumba: Ababio, pay your men and let them go back to their chores.

Ababio: That is alright. I will pay them presently. (*He inspects the grave.*) Perfect work. Perfect grave. Much, much superior to the one you constructed over the remains of the late Reverend Ambani. (*Pause.*) Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute. What about the epitaph, I mean the literature, you know, the writing on it? Something like, "Pastor Eliakim Ngoya, died on eer... no, no, no... was born on... eeh..." well, you know, that sort of thing. How about that?

Nuhu: Have you ever tried painting on wet cement?

Ababio: *(To the audience).* You see, a real professional, this is. *(To Nuhu).* No, I mean it, this time. I do. In fact, when I die, you will be the one to cemn...

Ndururu: Ababio, enough is enough. Our hands, unlike yours, needed elsewhere. Pay and free us to go our own way.

Ababio: Alright, alright, you know money has never been a problem. *(He begins to search his pockets.)* How much was it altogether?

Nuhu: Two hundred and fifty now, one hundred and fifty in weeks' time.

Ababio: *(To himself as he resumes the search in his pockets.)* 7 hundred and fifty now, one hundred and fifty later. There is no problem. *(Pause.)* Eeeh! Something is wrong somewhere. Something is definitely...

Jumba: Ababio!

Ababio: Uncle.

Jumba: You sold the bull, didn't you?

Ababio: Yes Uncle, I sold the damn beast.

Jumba: Then where is the money?

Ababio: *(Still fumbling with his pockets.)* That is what I am trying to find out.

Ndururu: I knew it. You can't get blood from a guava, can you? Ababio, why do you play games with our lives?

Ababio: Don't blame me, brother, don't blame me. You can say I am equally flabbergasted. *(Pause.)* Hey, this is funny. What? Just what is funny?

Ababio: This hole here. I hadn't noticed it before.

Jumba: What hole?

Ababio: This hole. This hole in my pocket. I swear it was there before. *(He turns the pocket inside out, and enough, there is a hole in it.)* Now this has got to be the opposite of a miracle!

Nuhu: It is a miracle that you actually got us to believe that you would pay us. Come Ndururu, come let us be off.

Ndururu: What? Without the money?

Nuhu: I said let us be off, or do you want to fight this curse?

Jumba: No, son of Rabala, wait. This was no ordinary work. You must not go away with sooty hearts. We have to reach an agreement over the payment.

Nuhu: I do not wish to exchange words with anyone over Pastor Ngoya's remains. Our eyes and ears have endured enough already.

Jumba: But the payment, we have to find...

Nuhu: No, let it be. It is no matter. I will pay my men, and Pastor Ngoya's blessings will be my payment. Come people, come, time is not on our side. *(Using sign language he instructs Mbaluto to carry some of their tools. They are about to depart when Ababio calls out to them.)*

Ababio: Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute. I am a man of honour and I won't let any of you fellows down. Now that is a fact. You know, I could sell another bull.

Nuhu: *(Disgusted.)* Good day headman.

Jumba: Good day Nuhu. Only don't let this matter burn the wisdom in that head of yours. I will need your advice on two other matters before the sun goes to sleep.

Nuhu: I will be in the hut. Just send someone when you need me.

Jumba: It is well. *(Nuhu stares at Ababio briefly, then exits in disgust followed by his two masons. A brief moment of embarrassing silence passes before Ababio summons enough courage to talk.)*

Ababio: Honest to God, I had it here.

Jumba: Ababio, you sold the bull, what did you do with the money?

Ababio: You see, first I bought the cement, then the bricks and

the sand, and eer... eer.

Jumba: Where is the rest of the money?

Ababio: Not so fast Uncle, not so fast. You can see I am genuinely trying to puzzle it out.

Jumba: Oh, I don't even know why I am fighting on your behalf. There is no one to fight for. And that is Aminata's great score. You are not a man!

Ababio: What! Me, not a man? Uncle, do you want me to...

Jumba: Spare me the sight. (Pause.) Your sister has things can point at. What about you? What have you done yourself? (Mimicking.) "I am a man, I am a man!" I challenge you to prove to me that you are a man. Alright, alright, I give up.

Ababio: Give up? No, you don't! You came and pleaded with begged me to help you and I said, yes! Why?

Ababio: Well, because... because... I mean you also have a in it, don't you?

Jumba: Yes, I have a stake in it, but that is no reason for I enter into a barren partnership with you. Your sacrificed me, he did. Persuaded me to accept the se knife and then the evil one struck. That devil is still with us, determined to flatten Membe from the first to the last. Now that evil spirit has found a permanent home in your sister.

Ababio: What?

Jumba: Yes, Aminata's body is the home of that evil spirit sent the red bird to destroy my children.

Ababio: But that was...

Jumba: There are no buts you eunuch! Aminata shall not land in Membe. So, drunk or sober, you will have to me to save Membe from that demon of a child.

Ababio: But what about the other elders? I know they think a God-send. What shall we do with them?

Jumba: I will make them understand the devil is no fool. Aminata's so called good deeds are a mere cover up for the evil within. I have even been warned of it, in a dream.

Your sister is evil through and through.

Ababio: You know now that you say so, I think I have noticed it too, in her eyes.

Jumba: That is nothing compared with what is in her heart. Even if she was an ordinary woman, I would not let Membe enter the future as the only clan to have offered land inheritance to a woman.

Ababio: No, no, no, no! That should not be allowed to happen! In any case, the battle is already won. Mzee is now firmly contained in his grave. Tell me, did Nuhu ask why it was dug out half way?

Jumba: No, you should know graves don't talk, elders do. That is why we must pay Nuhu well before any meeting of the land circle.

Ababio: Don't let that worry you, Uncle. As I said, I can sell another animal.

Jumba: Get the money and remember that tradition protects only the man who defends it. It shall not be said that it was during my time that a daughter of the village came back to settle among us. No, never!

Ababio: That piece of land is mine by right.

Jumba: It is that kind of talk that makes me call you a crow. Have you forgotten that it is your late father who has put us into all this mud? Don't you start shouting, "that land is mine, that land is mine," before this whole matter is resolved. Do you want to prejudice the land circle before they have made up their mind? Aminata is no chicken's feather you know. Just how come she has other copies of that thing called a will?

Ababio: Other copies? How?

Jumba: Ask Joshua, he knows all about it.

Ababio:

And he hid it from me? You just wait. I will strangle hell out of the little rat.

Jumba:

Why do you always think of violence and death moments of a crisis? It is this matter of the will that he to be strangled, not the innocent boy. Pastor Ngoya made him swear to remain silent.

Ababio:

Then how did you yourself...

Jumba:

Ababio, my umbilical cord was not buried together with yours. (*Pause.*) Now listen, you will have to stop drinking. You and I will have to talk to members of the land circle individually. We have to convince them that will or no will, Ngoya's land is Membe's land and belongs to his sons by tradition. (*Pause.*) Have you heard me well?

Ababio: Yes uncle, I have heard you.

Jumba:

Good. Now come over here. (*Leads Ababio to the grave.*) Put your right hand on the cross.

Ababio:

What! Why?

Jumba:

Just do as I say. Put your right hand on the cross. G... Now, I want you to swear by this cross on your father's grave that you will not touch alcohol from here henceforth.

Ababio:

(*Genuinely shocked.*) Henceforth? What is that supposed to mean?

Jumba:

Swear!

Ababio:

But Uncle I don't...

Jumba:

Swear!

Ababio:

No, let us wait until I am sober at least.

Jumba:

Alright, from now on, you are on your own. I am going. (*Makes as if to go.*)

Ababio:

No, Uncle, wait! (*Pause.*) I... eer I... swear!

Jumba:

Good, now follow me. (*Jumba exits fast. Ababio reluctantly follows.*)

PART ONE

Scene Two

(Monkey Business)

A spacious verandah at Dr. Mulemi's house. Against one of the walls hangs a dart board. Next to the board, on the same wall, hangs a score-board on which is written, M.A. and M.B. In the background can be heard various animal noises, prominent among them being monkey chatter. These noises are heard at intervals throughout the scene. Mulemi is busy playing. He throws the first set of three darts and records the score under M. B. He is so engrossed in the game that he does not notice Aunt Kezia's entry.

Kezia:

(*After watching him for a while.*) Dagitari, what are you killing?

Mulemi:

(*Surprised.*) Oh, hullo! Look who is here! Auntie Kezia! Are you surprised?

Kezia:

You can say that again! What brings you here?

Mulemi:

A bus, I came by bus. (*They both laugh and shake hands warmly.*)

Kezia:

A bus, I came by bus. (*They both laugh and shake hands warmly.*)

Mulemi:

Aeeh, this is a very pleasant surprise indeed! How are the people back home?

Kezia:

They are still breathing. But your father has not been himself this past week.

Mulemi:

Why? What is the matter with the old man?

Kezia:

That is a question for doctors like yourself to answer. Today the disease is in his big toe, tomorrow it is in his neck and the following day, the back. Ah, we really don't know what to do with him. We have used the roots and herbs that we know of, but the disease has defied them all. The travelling disease is no disease for an old body, I

tell you. Where are the children?

Mulemi: They must be somewhere in the neighbourhood playing with their friends.

Kezia: My namesake must be very big now.

Mulemi: Ah yes, even the boy is quite big. He will be tall, like grandfather.

Kezia: (*Absent-minded.*) That is good, that is good. But why is the mother?

Mulemi: Aminata went to visit her people. She went to Membe, but we are expecting her any time now.

Kezia: I see. And is that why you are throwing these thorns over the place? What are you killing on that board?

Mulemi: (*Amused.*) These are not thorns Auntie, they are darts. This is a game, a game of darts.

Kezia: A game of darts? (*Pause.*) Is it for men whose wives have gone away?

Mulemi: (*Unaware of what she is driving at.*) Oh, no, no, no, it is an open game for both men and women. It is best played by more than two people. I know some women who play very good at it. Do you want to have a go at it?

Kezia: That is madness. Do I look like one who has nothing to do?

Mulemi: (*Excited.*) Come on now, Auntie, this is a pastime activity. Now this area here is called the bull's eye. It is worth fifty points. Now you can decide to play the...

Kezia: Dagitari!

Mulemi: Yes Auntie.

Kezia: You are not the boy we brought up. And we blame your wife. Aminata has taught you wrong ways. How can a whole man, a doctor, spend all his time alone, killing nothing on a piece of board.

Mulemi: This is just a game, Auntie.

Kezia: Just a game? What about the monkeys, the rats and the rabbits you keep? For what games are they?

Mulemi: That is my profession, Auntie. The monkeys, the rabbits and the rats are for serious business. They are for research. Research, what game is that one? Is it a game of bulls too?

Kezia: (*Ignoring her.*) If I make a breakthrough, and I am sure I soon will, I could save mother Kenya millions of shillings in hard foreign currency.

Mulemi: Start off by saving yourself from this boredom. My brother's son, we know you and Aminata well and we are worried. The monkeys and the rabbits are alright, they do not think like us. But you, why do you play games with the human body?

Mulemi: Games with the human body?

Kezia: Yes, remember the truth does not sleep on the way. A man's stool is not for women's buttocks. Aminata should know that. Why is she fighting to inherit her father's land? What has she gone back to Membe for?

Mulemi: Auntie, Aminata is not fighting to inherit her late father's land. Her father left her a piece of land in a will. It is her right.

Kezia: Her right? Son, what has got into you? Since when has the ownership of land become a woman's right?

Mulemi: Auntie, let us drop that subject.

Kezia: Dagitari, it is not me talking. I am only your father's messenger. That is why I am here. And since I come not as a relative but a messenger, I will not mince my words. Your father sent me to you with a single question. Why did you marry Aminata?

Mulemi: Auntie, I am not that idle, you know.

Kezia: I am only a messenger, and your father will expect an answer. If it wasn't for the travelling disease, he would be here himself. Why did you two get married?

Mulemi: For the same reason as everyone else, to keep each of you company, get children and so on.

Kezia: *Aii* to keep each other company! Now who is keeping you company? Aminata or that piece of board?

Mulemi: For a messenger I would say you are going a little far.

Kezia: A little too far? No, my boy, I have not even begun. Your father spoke to me from dawn till the sun set over our heads. His words are still fresh in my ears. I have been married for twelve years, twelve years! I have what have you to show for it? Two children and a book on family planning! Son of my brother, we do want you to be the laughing stock of your agema (*Acting*.) "*Dagitari*, how many are those of your household these days?" (*Clears her throat*.) "Ah, we er... er now have two children, seven rabbits sixteen monkeys."

Mulemi: God! This is absurd!

Kezia: It is absurd, *Dagitari*. Very absurd that after sending that dowry to Aminata's home, we still have nothing to show for it.

Mulemi: Leave Aminata out of this pettiness.

Kezia: When we leave Aminata out of it, what are we left with? Nothing except you, this board and those chatter monkeys.

Mulemi: Auntie, I will not exchange words with you on this. Family planning is a topic that is dear to my heart. My now and my tomorrow. I have spent a lot of time finding answers to a lot of questions in this field. A healthy future, a healthy nation for our children and their children that has always been my concern. The fact that Aminata's father was equally concerned with this same dynamism is purely coincidental. This is why we must leave Aminata out of the debate. We planned for two children and

are happy. Happy because the children's future well-being is partly guaranteed by their number.

Kezia: God put Adam and *Hawa* in the Garden of Eden and said, "Go ye and multiply." He did not tell them to go ye and play darts!

Mulemi: Play darts and avoid breeding brats! Hey, that's a good one, don't you think so? (*Pause*.) Look here Auntie, you call them children, a blessing from God, but I call them mouths because that is the reality. Mouths to feed, mouths to take medicine, mouths that will wail and moan in discomfort. Aminata and I gave it serious thought before we finally made up our mind. Now she is free to pursue her career to its deepest canyons and help others improve their lives.

Kezia: We do not belittle what she has done for Membe and for us, no. All we now want is the woman in her. Is she to invest all her goodness in only two children? That, son of my brother, is our worry. Every time we switch on our wireless, it is Aminata's name we hear. What happened to yours?

Mulemi: Mine is a silent profession, Auntie, we do not operate on the sick over the radio. In any case, you should know how shy of the media Aminata is.

Kezia: No, *Dagitari*, Aminata is over-doing it. A woman is not a woman if she has no time for her husband and her children. That is why you are playing this game of boredom. You have made Aminata the husband in your house.

Mulemi: Aminata is as good a wife and mother as you will find anywhere among the very best of our women. She is not to blame for any of the major decisions which I have made in my life.

Kezia: What about the knife? She accepted the knife, didn't she?

Mulemi: That is news to me.

Kezia: *Dagiari*, if Aminata has sold her womanhood to you profession, then you will have to get yourself a second wife. You are an only son, bear that in mind.

Mulemi: This is a perfect example of how society kills the loved ones in its midst. Auntie Kezia, what was I born with brains for?

Kezia: The curse in Aminata's family has nothing to do with why God blessed us with brains. Just think, first it was her father, then her uncle and now it is she herself. What then is in that family that attracts them to the knife?

Mulemi: Wise judgement, that's all.

Kezia: She better be wise and drop that claim over her father's piece of land, otherwise she will not survive her uncle's curse. The letter which Jumba wrote to your father a few days ago, is not the kind to be ignored by people with brains. So stop her, lest the man raises a crippling curse upon her head.

Mulemi: Curses we welcome, it will not be the first time. Are you to remain islands of ignorance, in this changing world for fear of curses?

Kezia: Beware, son of my brother, the curse of a father, an uncle or an aunt runs right down the family tree for generations to come. Do not take it lightly. As I said, I am only a messenger, and I leave your father's words in your ears. Now I better go and visit my son, Agata, God bless them with a visitor last week.

Mulemi: A visitor?

Kezia: *(Excited.)* Yes, a baby girl. Your mother is lucky, the one will be named after her.

Mulemi: Is that one not the seventh?

Kezia: *(Triumphant.)* No, no, no, that one is the eighth. The ones were twins!

Mulemi: God bless them!

Kezia: That is as it should be. God bless you too, it is not yet too late, you know. *(Pause.)* So what shall I do with the story in my throat?

Mulemi: Story? What story?
Kezia: Adema's story about the rabbit which wished to lay eggs instead of giving birth to young ones.

Mulemi: But I don't need to be...

Kezia: Not you. It is for my namesake. I promised her the last time I was here.

Mulemi: How about taping it. I have a very good machine for...

Kezia: No, I will not allow my voice to be trapped in your witchcraft.

Mulemi: Alright, you tell it to me so that I can tell it to her when she returns from playing.

Kezia: No, I will come again, soon.

Mulemi: When is soon?

Kezia: When the house is warmer. Stay well and do not tell Aminata that I greeted her.

Mulemi: Go well Auntie. *(She exits. Mulemi stands still for a while watching Kezia's receding body. Suddenly he picks up the darts and hurls them on the board, one by one in quick succession. He repeats the action as Aminata enters. She carries a suitcase.)*

Aminata: What is the matter, my dear?

Mulemi: Hmm! Aah, Aminata!

Aminata: What has the board done?

Mulemi: Welcome home!

Aminata: Thank you. What about the board? You were throwing the darts as if you were bent on hurting the board.

Mulemi: Where is the evidence?

Aminata: The lines across your face. Where are the children?

Mulemi: Must be out there playing.

Aminata: In this kind of weather?

Mulemi: Freedom of choice. It is their right.

Aminata: My uncle should be here to hear you talk of rights. That a word he is allergic to, rights.

Mulemi: But you made him see sense, didn't you?

Aminata: You know I did not go to Membe to make anyone see sense. No, I merely went there to formally receive a gift of soil.

Mulemi: And did you formally receive it?

Aminata: No. It looks like it will have to be a court case. Jumba a fox, I tell you. Now they have a fantastic story about the grave and why they had to cement it in a hurry. According to them, our late father died after he had changed his mind about the cementing of his grave. The old man is supposed to have called the two of them, Ababio and my uncle, to his bedside two days before he died. That is when he supposedly talked to them about the burial arrangements. Ababio is even ready to swear by the grave that this is the absolute truth.

Mulemi: What about the will? That is what is important.

Aminata: (*Sarcastic.*) In Membe, what is written down on a piece of paper is of no consequence whatsoever. They want the evidence of the living, not the dead.

Mulemi: Oh, but that should be easy. I mean, we have Joshua on our side. He is the chief witness.

Aminata: In law, their defence is totally hopeless. Some of the most enlightened elders know this. But the rest led by Jumba are totally impervious to reason.

Mulemi: So what did you do?

Aminata: Nothing. In fact most of them were quite surprised at my silence. You see, as soon as I arrived at my uncle's house the elders of the land were summoned. Within an hour they were all there quietly seated. From the anxiety on their faces, I guessed that they were expecting a big

confrontation between me, Ababio and my uncle. But they were wrong. What would I gain from such a confrontation? Absolutely nothing. So I just sat there and played it by the ear. You know, the art of doing nothing very well. After four hours they were still undecided, and my uncle was already losing his temper, as usual. The meeting was postponed to the following day, but that too did not resolve the issue.

Mulemi: Do they not realise the numerous journeys you have saved their womenfolk to the rivers and back?

Aminata: The women are solidly behind me, and some of them have been talking to their husbands. So you see, it is no longer my fight.

Mulemi: Your uncle is a perfect mockery of enlightened tribal leadership on the continent.

Aminata: On the continent! That's too much credit. (*Pause.*) But you know, while there, I got this feeling that he doesn't actually hate me, after all. No, it is fear. A strange kind of fear, you know, like the fear of darkness, of the unknown.

Mulemi: That makes the two of you, you and Mbaluto.

Aminata: Yes, now I understand why he resents Mbaluto. It's because he doesn't understand him. The power of silence, the power of the unknown. All that potential locked up in the silence of a historical tragedy. It's true of us women as well. Over the years, men have thrived in our silence. Over the years men have buried us with our potential, and that is what is tragic. Can you imagine burying Mbaluto without ever having heard a single word from him?

Mulemi: Darling, let's not be sentimental about it. You are a lawyer, remember.

Aminata: Darling, I know I am a lawyer, but I also know that I am a woman, your wife, and I feel. I have tears too. Shall I pretend that I do not feel just because of my professional wig?

Mulemi: Perhaps Auntie Kezia should have stayed a little longer. She would not have believed her ears.

Aminata: Auntie Kezia!

Mulemi: Yes, she left only a few minutes ago. Said she would only return when the house is warmer.

Aminata: She was right. It gets a bit too quiet when the kids are out playing.

Mulemi: That is not what she meant. "God created Adam and Eve and told them to fill up the world with children." That was the message she came to drum into our heads. The importance of it all is that they think it's you who had the operation. They don't know that I am my own guinea pig.

Aminata: So what do they want you to do?

Mulemi: Isn't it obvious? The prescription is a second wife.

Aminata: Poor people! I wish they would try and understand.

Mulemi: It's not them, Aminata, it's us. The decision was made long ago and I have no regrets. We had to set the pace by providing an inspiring example. Any weakening on our part meant the battle is lost. Our own inspiration is your late father, old yet wise. He saw well into the future.

Aminata: George, there are days when I have my doubts too.

Mulemi: Doubts? You?

Aminata: Yes. We can't be absolutely sure, can we?

Mulemi: Come on now, you know it's not necessary for us to be absolutely sure. Right now I am about eighty per cent sure that it is temporary. I mean if it works with monks and rabbits, why should it not work with me? The method is quite safe and should get out of the labs in a few months time. My only regret now is that this land case of yours is beginning to slow me down. Three out of the five experiments I set up last week were a total disaster.

Aminata: Yes, George.

Mulemi:

Why don't you drop this business of the will and let us concentrate on the things that really matter? It's beginning to raise a storm in a tea cup.

Aminata: That doesn't sound like my husband at all. George, that will be only the beginning, the storm is yet to come. And it won't be in a tea cup either.

Mulemi: Your uncle is taking this whole matter of inheritance a little too far. Why does he find it necessary to write letters to my father?

Aminata: (In shock.) No, he hasn't!

Mulemi: Yes, he has. That is why Auntie Kezia came.

Aminata: Then I shall fight them to the bitter end. George, this is not my battle. No. I mean, look at us, we have worked hard, bought land and other property. Now why should our daughter be barred from inheriting any part of that property?

Mulemi: All I am saying is that this battle need not be fought out there in the village. There is no justice there.

Aminata: That is precisely why I am asking, no, demanding that my Uncle and his circle of elders tell me what is wrong with being a woman. I want them to tell me what is wrong with me!

Mulemi: Mongers in taboos and superstitions.

Aminata: Their taboos are the dried leaves of a rootless tree. What became of that famous one of the chicken soup? Did it kill me? And having survived it to adulthood, my Uncle predicted a childless life for me, didn't he? Oh, the man is evil, but his evil will turn against him one day. His union with Ababio is based on nothing but mutual ignorance.

Mulemi: Mutual ignorance, I like that. A friendship that is based on mutual ignorance is like a bird's feather, discarded in mid-air. That is why they want to enlist my father's support. Hitting below the belt in order to provoke an

immature confrontation.

Aminata: I wish they knew how persistently I tried to resist offer of soil. But the old man was so determined to it to me that it was no use arguing with him any more. That is why I don't want to disappoint him by giving the fight for it. For over an hour, he begged me and finally demanded that I accept it. It wasn't easy, and I told him so, but he wouldn't settle for anything less. It was in the afternoon, exactly three days before he died peacefully in his sleep. You see, I had left him sleeping in his room and gone into the next room to look at pictures in my family album. Suddenly, I heard a feeble knock at the door. At first I thought it was Joshua. "Come in," I said. Slowly the door was pushed open, and there he was, weak, but seemingly happy. *(During the above scene the feeble knock will be heard. The door will be opened slowly so that by the end of Aminata's lines, Ngo's figure, in a bright dressing gown, will appear, exactly as described by Aminata.)*

Ngoya: Aah, Aminata, there you are.

Aminata: Father!

Ngoya: Yes, child, do not be surprised, I am still strong.

Aminata: No, come, come and sit over here.

Ngoya: No, I shall not sit. For two weeks now, I have been lying in that bed. But today I felt energy coming back into my feet and I said, praise the Lord. That is why I am here, I want to talk to you.

Aminata: But is it really necessary to talk now, father? Must I now? I mean you have just taken your medicine. You need to rest.

Ngoya: This is rest child, this is rest. You can see I am on my feet once again. Aminata, I came to share a thought with you. I came to say thank you for what you and your husband have done for me and for the people of Membe.

Aminata: Father, you know that is not necessary.

Ngoya: Isn't it? You and your husband have been good to me, and God and man have seen your actions. Sometimes when I sit down and reflect upon it, doubts cloud my head. "Have I been a bother to the young ones? Why have I demanded so much from the children?" These are some of the questions that plague my mind. Then I sit back and see myself clearly as one who lived before his time. That is when I ask God for guidance. Yes, child, that is when I kneel down to pray. *(He kneels down and prays.)* God, the time-tested ways.

Of our people are best

Yet Oh, Lord, make us wise

That we may accept change. Amen.

(Standing up.) God bless you, child.

Thank you, father.

Ngoya: God bless your brothers too. May their eyes be open the way yours are. Aminata, your mother was a great woman, and when she died, I thought that was the end of me. But then you took it particularly well. That gave me the will to carry on. Yes, you taught me to live. You see, people call you Ngoya's daughter, but in my own mind I say, Aminata is my son. Son, daughter, mother, father, all children of God. Where is the difference, Aminata?

Yes father.

Aminata: When I was a small child, our mothers lived like prisoners. There were numerous activities in which they were not permitted to join. Indeed they were even barred from eating certain types of food. Yes, but as a man of God, I looked at the taboos and the superstitions and said, no. We are being unfair to our womenfolk. So I led the campaign that made women to work confidently beside their men. I used you in that campaign. Do you remember the day of the chicken soup?

Of course father, how can I forget that day?

Ngoya:

You were only a baby then. At first your mothers afraid, but gradually, they accepted the change and to live with it. The men were not happy either, and uncle, Jumba was the unhappiest of them all. If he you now, it is because I used you to prove them wrong. They thought that you would die, but here you are, here you are.

Aminata:

Thank you father, now I think you should go back to and rest.

Ngoya:

Child, this is rest. Which father can face his daughter and say the things that I am now saying to you? I have said ever so often in my sermons, the image of man and of woman that we have are the creation of minds. Such division should not be of any consequence to us whatsoever. There are good people and there are evil people. That is all. Yours is a clean heart, Aminata and your husband knows it well.

Aminata:

Father.

Ngoya:

Yes, child.

Aminata:

You will make me cry.

Ngoya:

You? No, it is not in you to cry. Your brother Ababio cry, but not you. No, not my Aminata. You see, you the green hill that was sang about long, long ago, and your husband. *(He bursts into song and is joined by Aminata in an emotional first verse of, "There is a green hill far away.")*

There is a green hill far away

Without a city wall

Where the dear Lord was crucified

He died to save us all

Oh dearly, dearly has he loved

And we must love Him too

And trust in His redeeming blood

And try His works to do.

Ngoya:

You sing well.

Aminata:

You too, I am surprised.

Ngoya:

Thank you, now I must say what I came to say. I have a small gift for you.

Aminata:

A gift? What for?

Ngoya:

My child, what are gifts for? The women of Membe sing your name, and the children echo their voices, wishing you long life. Have you ever wondered why they sing your praises? No you wouldn't. Not you. I myself cannot sing your praises much longer, and that is why I have decided to offer the small gift to you. A token three acres of my own piece of land. Do whatever you please with it.

Aminata:

Land? No. Father, you know women do not inherit land from their fathers.

Ngoya:

You are not a woman Aminata, you are my child. Will you or will you not accept the gift?

Aminata:

Do I have any choice?

Ngoya:

I will listen.

Aminata:

It is difficult.

Ngoya:

It is difficult, I know, but we must accept change. The way your innocent hands accepted that bowl of chicken soup, so must you accept the soil, a gift from your father, in his last days on earth.

Aminata:

I think you should... I mean, what can I say? Give me time father, give me time. I will need to consult George. Your husband will understand, I know. He will not refuse. Yes, but I will need his opinion.

Ngoya:

Your husband will understand, I know. He will not refuse.

Aminata:

Yes, but I will need his opinion.

Ngoya:

Listen child, the will is written and sealed. You shall have your own copy of it soon. I trust that you shall not disappoint me when I am gone. *(He begins to cough uncontrollably. Aminata rushes to his aid.)* No child, go back, yes, go back. You can see I am on my feet. *(Aminata*

PART TWO

Scene One

(Battle of Wits)

goes back to where she was just before the flashba
Thank you, child. Goodbye.

Aminata: Goodbye father. (*Ngoya retreats, closing the door beh
him.*) For some strange reason I did not bother to ex
him back to his room. It was only after he had gone
I realised that... that he was going to die. Soon afte
made up my mind that I would accept the soil.

Mulemi: Why did he not inform your brother and your Uncle ab
the will then?

Aminata: I wish I knew why. But a day before he died, he
Joshua to call Uncle and Ababio, but neither of th
turned up.

Mulemi: What shall we do then?

Aminata: It will have to be a court case. I will give them a
days, after which I will go to court.

Mulemi: I am not too sure of the wisdom in that.

Aminata: Let us wait and see. In the meantime I have to find a
competent instructor.

Mulemi: A competent instructor?

Aminata: Yes, the youth dance troupe had no instructor, so I offe
to hire a choreographer for them.

Mulemi: You know you surprise me.

Aminata: That is marriage, full of surprises. Oh, now I remem
What?

Mulemi: What?

Aminata: Another surprise for you from the village. Mama Rosi
idea.

Mulemi: What is it?

Aminata: Traditional fertility herbs! (*They stare at each o
briefly as lights fade.*)

Early afternoon, at Jumba's home. The action takes place in the space
between the main family house, which is to the right of the stage, and
Jumba's hut which is to the left. Only the front walls of each of the
houses can be seen. A meandering path between the two houses
suggests that the houses are not as near to each other as they may
appear on stage. Close to Jumba's hut is a safari bed, convenient for
the man's siesta. As curtains open Ababio's drunken voice can be heard
singing, at a distance. As he gets closer to the homestead, he
occasionally stops singing and talks to himself.

Ghasia: Let them talk! So what? What can they do? Zero!

I was born a man, period! And that is what matters. And
you know, my uncle is also another one. (*Mimics Jumba.*)
"Ababio, you will have to stop drinking". Now, now, now,
now, what, in God's name, did he mean by that? **Ghasia!**
(*Sings briefly.*) Now you tell me. What is wrong with a
small *faiira* of *Ching? Ching!* That is something! That is
something! No other drink can beat that one. No, I mean
it. Jesus tried his hand but he didn't quite come up with
an equivalent. Yaa, and I am speaking from experience.
Twelve years of experience! Yaa, that swallow is good.
(*Ticks the advantages off his fingers.*) It is cheap, it jogs
the brain, but above all, it is a natural family planner.
Yaa, I mean it. You see, it simply makes it impossible for
one to rise to the occasion. (*He sings as he moves closer
to the family house.*) Mama Rosina! Mama Rosina, I am
passing! (*The door is opened and Rosina comes out.*)
Rosina: What is it? Why do you howl my name across the plains?
Ababio: Howl is a bit too strong, Mama Rosina.

Rosina: Where have you been?

Ababio: Are you sure you want an answer to that one?

Rosina: Yes, Agege has been to every drinking home, look for you.

Ababio: Agege looking for me? What for?

Rosina: We asked him to look for you. Your sister is here, would like to speak with you.

Ababio: Who? Aminata? Mama Rosina, goodbye. (*Attempts to stagger off.*)

Rosina: Ababio!

Ababio: I said goodbye!

Rosina: (*Authoritative.*) Ababio!

Ababio: What now?

Rosina: Come back here! (*Ababio reluctantly walks back to where Rosina is.*)

Ababio: Mama Rosina, I don't want to see her.

Rosina: What kind of talk is that? Why don't you want to see your sister?

Ababio: Aminata is not my sister. She is a beast, a she-elephant that wants to trample everyone underfoot.

Rosina: Between you and Aminata, who is a beast?

Ababio: Go on, gang up with her, but don't push me against a wall. Don't make me say things that I don't want to say.

Rosina: Those things that you keep to yourself will be your trouble. You and Aminata will have to sit down and talk. Otherwise will you ever resolve your differences.

Ababio: Ask her to go and bring back my wife and children for me.

Rosina: Ababio, you will not find a scapegoat in Aminata. Your sister was miles away when your wife packed up her belongings and went back to her people.

Ababio: I can prove it, Mama Rosina. I can prove that Aminata was responsible for Misiyah's departure.

Rosina: Prove it Ababio, prove it.

Ababio: It is common knowledge that Misiyah has always relied on Aminata for advice. And don't forget that I knew her through the scheming lawyer!

Rosina: Is that what you call proof?

Ababio: Listen, Mama Rosina, when Aminata and I quarrelled on the eve of our father's burial, she and Misiyah disappeared for two hours. Now what do you think they were talking about? It was after their return that the real trouble began. That night, Misiyah kept calling me names, things she had never called me before. I knew then that life would never be the same again between us. Yes, she made her point, proved that I, Ababio, was irresponsible.

Rosina: Ababio, you are wrong. You do not at all know your sister well. You grew up together but something inside your mind prevents you from understanding Aminata. In the matter of Misiyah and her departure, you are your own enemy. *Chang'aa* does not have the smell of a flower, you know.

Ababio: (*Furious.*) You call her now! Where is she? Call her now and let her deny it! Call her!

Aminata: (*Who has just emerged from the house.*) Here I am, brother. (*Pause.*) Mama Rosina, leave us for a while.

Ababio: (*Panicking.*) No! Mama Rosina, you stay!

Aminata: Very well then, stay, Mama Rosina. Ababio, you are our eldest in Ngoya's family, and I want us to talk. It is true that Misiyah and I were good friends before the two of you got married. I believe we still are good friends. After all she is my sister-in-law. Now do you really believe I would walk over to her and tell her what a bad husband she has in my brother?

Ababio: But you did!

Aminata: Did I? With what motive?

Ababio: Motive? Now don't you lawyer me! Don't bring in your

lawyer jargon because it doesn't impress me. Every-
one knows that Misiash disappeared only a few days after
yourself had left. You hatched that plan, didn't you?

Aminata: Just think for a moment. Is that the first time that Mi-
siash has walked out on you? Mama Rosina, how many times
has Misiash packed up her belongings and gone back to
her people?

Rosina: No, you children should leave me out of this talk.

Aminata: My brother, you and Uncle Jumba surprise me. Why
do you abhor my visit here? Where shall I run to, should
my husband and I disagree the way you and Misiash
disagree? You have pulled that question straight from my lips.
What is what I have been asking them this past week. The
people of a disturbed marriage are washed by a woman's
people. Who do they think will wash yours?

Aminata: I have paid school fees for Ababio's children, my un-
cle's tailoring business was started with my own funds,
water you drink here has my name on it, and now
you dance troupe. What more do you and Uncle Jumba
want from me?

Rosina: Aminata, the thanks of a jealous neighbour
are accompanied by a curse. These people will thank
you when you are dead and gone.

Aminata: You are right, Mama Rosina, I have been thanked with
a soiled name.

Rosina: Ababio, be a man and face your sister. Tell Aminata
that she has gone wrong. That is all she is asking for.

Ababio: I don't want to talk!

Rosina: That makes the two of you. Your uncle doesn't want
to talk, either. And let this be the end of your
campaign against your sister's innocent name.

Ababio: Innocent name, my foot!

Aminata: Mama Rosina, we waste our breath for nothing. Look
at him. Look at the ruins that are left of our mother's

Ababio: Now did you mark her words? "Our mother's son"! Did
you hear that, Mama Rosina? That is precisely why I
detest her. She can never utter a single sentence without
propping up women!

Aminata: That is your disease. It's all up in your mind, Ababio.
And I put it to you that you hate women in general and
me in particular, because of your own personal
inadequacies.

Ababio: Go on, I am listening.

Aminata: I further put it to you that your hatred or fear of what I
have done for Membe's people springs from a deep rooted
inferiority complex.

Ababio: Now you are asking for trouble. If you provoke me any
further, I will wipe you out of existence.

Aminata: (*Calm.*) That is a lie, Ababio. It is not me you want to
wipe out of existence, no. You want to forget the water
project. You want to forget the tailoring business. You
want to forget the school fees which I have been paying
for your children. You want to forget the coffin and all.
Yes, my brother, those are the things that you want to
wipe out of your existence. Now tell me I am wrong and
I will go straight back to my husband and children.

Ababio: You are a serpent, and if you had a husband, a truly
African husband, you wouldn't be here. What you need
is someone to tame you.

Aminata: Yes, Ababio, perhaps I am a serpent, but I will have you
and Uncle understand that I am not fighting tradition.
No, I am merely seeking to prevent an epidemic of your
kind of disease. This earth is neither for male nor female
feet. No, this earth is for strong feet, feet that will move
than carry development-conscious minds. We do not want
to build a nation of frustrated little adults.

Ababio: Who says I am frustrated?

Aminata: I talk of the future, Ababio. You and I have no time for

today. So I talk of tomorrow's generation, tomorrow's generation because this tradition which so desperately cling to is not on their side. Right now is not on your side either, so why cling to it? Ababio, our case, tradition is a lie, and I am the symbol of degeneration of that lie. Yes, I will not mince my words on this one. Our father proved them wrong over a decade ago. Tell me, what is wrong with enlightened change? (*Agege has just entered in time to hear the question*)

Agege:

Me, I want to give the answer straight.

Rosina:

Agege, this is serious talk.

Agege:

Serious talk? Alright, I am serious to answer. (*Ababio:* Change is like rest.

Rosina:

Agege, be a good man and go and split that firewood behind the house, for me. The axe is at the entrance of the granary.

Agege:

Me, I want to go back to the dance field. Heel! Aminababio: they are singing and dancing with your name. (*He is the new composition in praise of Aminata and da comically.*)

Aminata witu, tunakupenda!

Aminata, Aminata, nguvio!

Aminata witu, unakaribishwa!

Aminataa, Aminata wooyee!

Ababio:

This is madness.

Agege:

Song dance you call madness? You are empty cococon head! (*Turns to Aminata.*) Aminata, if you want to yourself in song, come you hear now, now.

Aminata:

Later Agege, later. Not now.

Agege:

Later is good. Mamma Rosina, firewood later. (*He da his way out.*)

Aminata:

You should borrow a leaf from that man. He is happy hang-ups.

You see, Mamma Rosina, now she is comparing me with that lunatic.

Who are we to judge him lunatic?

An idiot is an idiot, whether we judge him or not. And a woman is a woman, water projects or no water projects.

So where is the wisdom in those words? What have you said? (*Hands him a letter.*) Here, here is a letter from a wise man, your brother in India. (*Ababio grabs the letter and reads it silently while the two women watch him.*)

He is a fool. Five years in India and he still hasn't grown up!

He knows better than to tamper with a dying man's wishes. A will is a legal document irrespective of whom it favours.

You wait till the elders hear of this, this wisdom from India. Why didn't he come to the funeral? He was informed in good time, wasn't he?

(*Seizing the opportunity to rub it in.*) You are right brother, he should have bought his father a coffin. (*The sarcasm is too much for Ababio. He tears the letter into small bits and begins to stagger off.*) That was only a copy. Each elder of the land circle has a copy of his own, too.

Ghasia! Women! What do they know? Zero! Let me go and have one more *faiira* and then they will know who I am. Ababio, son of Pastor Ngoya, deceased. Only heir to the Ngoya estate, that is me. *Ghasia!* What can they do? Zero! (*He exits as Jumba emerges from the hut carrying a blanket. He is much weaker than he was in Act One Scene One.*)

(*To Aminata.*) Come inside, I see he is preparing to receive the elders. (*The two women enter the family house. Jumba spreads the blanket on the bed and is about to sit on it when two elders, Midambo and Amata, emerge from behind the hut.*)

Midambo: Greetings, Headman.

Jumba: Greetings, elders. Amata, I see you have safely returned from the city.

Amata: Yes, I am back. How is it with you?

Jumba: I will pull through. I think it is the mosquito disease. I will knock it down.

Midambo: Are you on medicine?

Jumba: Yes, I am. I finally gave in, and now the whole house is full of herbs and roots.

Midambo: That is good. If it is the mosquito disease, as you say, you should be chewing *musyi gwa nzogu*. Don't play games with it.

Jumba: That is what has improved me. The demons come no more. (*Calling.*) Mamma Rosina!

Rosina: (*From the house.*) Yoo!

Jumba: Bring us stools, two!

Rosina: I have heard you! (*Back to Amata.*)

Jumba: So when did you return from the city?

Amata: Last evening.

Jumba: And how is the boy now?

Amata: He will recover. It was only a minor accident, but he knows how people talk in this village. Broken brain, internal bleeding and all. Did I place to hide my ears?

Jumba: It is good they were all wrong. I always say, that man is our bull. No evil should befall him. (*Pause.*) Amata: town itself must be very large now?

Amata: It is. You cannot believe it is the same town which worked more than twenty years ago.

Midambo: The world around us has become one big change.

Amata: You are right, Midambo. Today there is a tall tree but tomorrow, it is a tall building. We are being left

The things I saw in the city! A small house like this, this one of Jumba... they cook there, bathe there, sleep there... they even go to the bush right there! Can you imagine me, son of Ngode the leopard, sharing a toilet with my daughter-in-law?

Midambo: Oh! Oh! Oh! So what did you do?

Amata: What was I to do? There were no bushes nearby! (*They all laugh.*)

Midambo: Our children have changed the world.

Amata: You have spoken! We are being left behind. Even the bus in which I travelled from my son's house to the hospital, do you know who was driving it?

Jumba: Not a driver?

Amata: What driver? It was somebody's daughter, a young girl whose breasts are still shy.

Jumba: (*Warning.*) Is that not the life into which you want to drag us?

Amata: (*Evaluating Jumba's question.*) I saw it with my own eyes. The city is busy eating our ways of ages and we are being left behind.

Midambo: Town people are cursed.

Amata: Yes, and the curse is spreading fast. Our children's children back-bite us while we are seated there with them. (*Rosina brings in the chairs and greets the elders.*)

Rosina: Amata, how is the boy?

Amata: He will recover. It was only a minor accident.

Rosina: That is good. The town itself must be very large now?

Amata: It is. You cannot believe it is...

Midambo: (*Excited.*) What! Am I hearing right?

Jumba: What is it?

Midambo: Amata, haven't you noticed anything strange?

Amata: What?

- Midambo:** Headman Jumba here and his wife have the same mind! One mind!
- Jumba:** What are you talking about?
- Midambo:** The words which she has just used now are the same ones which Jumba used when he was asking you about your son!
- Amata:** (*Contemplative.*) Yes, now that you say so, it is true. Mama Rosina, your questions about my son and the answers are the very same ones which your husband asked me a little while ago!
- Rosina:** I do not see anything strange with that. Two people asking questions about the same boy and the same answer.
- Midambo:** Ah! Ah! There is more to this than meets the eye.
- Rosina:** You men always dismiss us, women, as great talkers. Now which one of you is a woman?
- Jumba:** Now where is that coming from?
- Rosina:** I am quiet. Here, this is from Aminata. (*Hands him a letter.*)
- Jumba:** Aminata? When did she arrive?
- Rosina:** This morning, but she spent most of her time with the dance troupe.
- Midambo:** Eeh, Headman, you should see the young ones. Their teacher is what they needed. Aminata did well to get to know one. (*He sings one of his favourite songs and dances briefly. Jumba realises in a flash that the two elders are not in his camp.*) Now I am sure we will fair on with this year's inter-clan festival.
- Jumba:** (*Unable to control his anger.*) We have always done well at the dance festival.
- Midambo:** Have we? When did we last outdance Ivona and Kere?
- Rosina:** Midambo, why do you waste your breath? Have you forgotten who the dancing teacher is?
- Jumba:** You! These, these elders are probably hungry.
- Amata:** No, Mama Rosina, our stomachs are tight. Beside
- will not stay long. We only came to chew a few words with your old man, here.
- Rosina:** I will leave you to yourselves then.
- Amata:** It is well. (*Rosina walks back to the family house.*) Where is the letter from?
- Jumba:** Hmm?
- Amata:** The letter, where is it from?
- Jumba:** Ah, this? This is from... ah, it is nothing.
- Midambo:** Headman, we are members of your stool circle. What is it you are hiding from us?
- Jumba:** Nothing.
- Midambo:** Nothing? Jumba, since we buried your brother, you have not been the headman we have always known. Why do you retreat into yourself? What secret mountain was there between you and your brother?
- Jumba:** My late brother and I were great friends.
- Midambo:** Great friends? What about the rumours in the air? Is it not true that when he was on his death bed he sent for you but you refused to heed his call?
- Jumba:** I was not myself then, I was unwell.
- Midambo:** And did you send anyone to tell him so? Speak the truth elder, these words in the air blacken our stool of rule.
- Jumba:** What are you talking about? What have you come to do?
- Amata:** Peace headman, we came to talk.
- Jumba:** Then talk straight. I am not yet too old to learn.
- Amata:** This matter of the letter, the envelope is a familiar one. Familiar?
- Midambo:** Yes, headman, we came to see you because we too have received copies of that letter.
- Jumba:** From where? From whom?
- Midambo:** From our son in India.
- Jumba:** The boy must be crazy. Ngoya fathered a lunatic, too.

Midambo: The boy may be crazy, but we are not. The day of *Iba* is not far, and our decision over Aminata's piece of land is eagerly awaited.

Jumba: Now hear him. Aminata's piece of land indeed! Midambo who made you judge in the affairs of Nyarango's family?

Midambo: Calm down man, we are elders of Membe's stool of and Nyarango's family is a Membe family. (*Showing own letter*) These words from your nephew in India for our ears too.

Amata: Midambo has spoken well. The matter of that piece of land has been on our shoulders for a long time now we know that you have been unwell, but what shall we tell the people on the day of *Ibarasa*?

Jumba: Who calls meetings here?

Amata: We know you do.

Jumba: Good. Now listen, there will be a meeting only we say so.

Amata: But surely, Headman...

Jumba: Right now I am unwell. Tell the rest of the elders.

Midambo: Headman, the elders met this morning.

Jumba: What? Without me?

Midambo: You are unwell!

Jumba: Go on.

Midambo: The elders of the land circle asked us to come and say a few words with you.

Jumba: I know that. Who led the meeting?

Midambo: They asked Amugune to lead the meeting.

Jumba: Just as I thought. All sold out to ways of strangers. When you went to visit your son in hospital, did you visit Aminata?

Amata: Yes... but... but... yes, my daughter-in-law was there. I went to see the little ones. But... mind you, visit had nothing to do with the land case.

Jumba: Very well then, you may take advantage of my illness and succeed for a while. But I will have you understand that the stool of rule without your support is a breastless woman, Midambo.

Midambo: Yes, Headman.

Jumba: Send Agege to the homes of all the elders of the stool. Inform them that I have called for a sunset meeting here, today. It is then that I shall hear your advice. (*Jumba lies on the bed and covers himself completely, with the blanket. The two elders are shocked at their headman's behaviour. They stare helplessly, first at each other and then at the bed. Finally they shrug and leave in utter disgust. Rosina, who has been eavesdropping by the door of the family house, now comes out and watches the elders disappear.*)

Rosina: (*Calling in a loud whisper.*) Aminata! Aminata!

Aminata: Yes, Mama Rosina.

Rosina: Come!

Aminata: (*Emerging from the house.*) What is it?

Rosina: I don't know. I just don't know what is happening to your uncle. The elders are gone.

Aminata: Gone? So soon?

Rosina: He snapped at them. Drove them away like small children.

Aminata: Mama Rosina, something has got to be done before it is too late. We have got to persuade him to see a specialist.

Rosina: No child, you do not understand. Only your Uncle can cure himself. If only he saw the world around him with a neutral eye, he would not be lying on that bed.

Aminata: That is why we have got to find a specialist for him. My husband and I will see to that.

Rosina: No doctor can cure Jumba's pride of mind.

Aminata: There is hope, Mama Rosina. Even Ababio's drunkenness

can be cured by a specialist. (Suddenly, Jumba utters a horrible scream which sends the women cowering, jumps out of bed and begins to appeal to an invisible being to leave him alone.)

Jumba:

No! No! Please, please I beg you! Please leave me alone. Yes, leave me alone. Hmm? Who? You? No, I don't know you. No, never! What? My brother? But that's impossible! Yes, my brother is dead. He died. I am telling you... Hmm? Then take off the mask. Yes, take off the mask. Oh, my God, Yes! Pastor forgive me! I am so sorry. Hmm? No, I deny that. Yes, I deny it. I am sorry, He that was Ababio's idea. It is true, Pastor, I speak the truth. Yes, but peace. Peace, Pastor, peace! Reconciliate you always preached reconciliation. The what? I am so sorry. Yes, I am, I learnt too late that it was your wish. Yes, but... but we can still knock it down. Cement is not so strong. No, no please. (Kneels.) I am on my knees, pastor, please stay where you are. Hmm? Aminata? No, no, no, I am so sorry, yes, yes, it will be done. Yes, from the Mugum the banana plantation. Yes Pastor, I will. Yes, I will. (As he speaks the last words, he goes back to bed and covers himself as before.)

Aminata:

My God, I don't believe this!

Rosina:

He will be alright.

Aminata:

Are you sure?

Rosina:

I am his wife.

Aminata:

Mama Rosina, I am scared. Aren't you?

Rosina:

Scared? Child, does the lioness flee when the lion roars?

Aminata:

Whom was he addressing?

Rosina:

How am I to know? Did you yourself hear his words?

Aminata:

Not a word.

Rosina:

Only he can cure himself. You see, he has not quite recovered to live with that tragedy of the red cock. That is why he walks in his sleep, chasing imaginary children from

shadows. Sometimes he has angry exchanges with your late father.

Aminata:

My late father?

Rosina:

Yes, you see, Pastor Ngoya offered the plot and the tree to the church people. They were due to have uprooted that tree the day after the accident. Now why was the tree struck by the bird on that very day?

Aminata:

I don't want to hear any more of this.

Rosina:

You are stronger than that, Aminata. And so you shall hear the rest. Your uncle strongly believes that you and your father were responsible for that tragedy.

Aminata:

Me?

Rosina:

Yes, my husband secretly thinks that you have been cursed with evil powers. That explains why you survived the red cock.

Aminata:

What about Mbaluto? He survived too.

Rosina:

Mbaluto lives still, but he did not survive the tragedy.

Aminata:

That is, according to your uncle.

Aminata:

(Almost to herself.) Me!

Rosina:

Yes child, that is how bad your uncle's disease is.

Aminata:

Mama Rosina!

Rosina:

Speak, Aminata.

Aminata:

Am I evil?

Rosina:

Of course not, child. It's all a thing of the mind.

Aminata:

Do I look evil?

Rosina:

Child, I would not have told you all these if I thought you were evil.

Aminata:

Then why have you waited till now, to tell me these things?

Rosina:

Aminata, I was brought up by my grandmother, and one of the things she taught me was never to sow seeds unless I was sure the soil was fertile. So this morning when you arrived from the city and we shook hands in greeting, I felt your readiness. So I said to myself, yes, she is ripe

now, she is ready, she can take it. That is why you heard what you have heard.

Aminata: Mama Rosina, you have so much wisdom locked in your simplicity that I sometimes wonder whether I really know you. Thank you, for opening a window in my uncle's mind. Now I am more convinced that he is a psychiatrist.

Rosina: You are wrong again, Aminata. A psychiatrist will heal that wound of the second knife.

Aminata: That is why George's research is crucial. If he succeeds, the worry of the second knife will be a thing of the past. The process can be reversed. It has already worked with two monkeys and... (*Jumba wakes up and sits on bed.*) He is up again.

Rosina: Quick, come inside. (*Aminata enters the family home. Rosina is about to follow when Jumba calls her.*)

Jumba: Mama Rosina!

Rosina: I hear you.

Jumba: Come. (*Rosina takes the meandering path and goes to Jumba.*)

Rosina: Are you alright?

Jumba: Why do you ask?

Rosina: The elders, what happened?

Jumba: They went away, but they will be back at sunset.

Rosina: Are you sure?

Jumba: What kind of question is that? I tell no lies. (*Pause.*) Listen, I have been in deep thought.

Rosina: Deep thought?

Jumba: Yes, I have been thinking. I was a Christian once, wasn't I?

Rosina: You are still baptised.

Jumba: Me?

Yes, Aberenego Jumba.

Rosina: No, I dropped that one, and you know it. That is what created the mountain between me and Ngoya.

Jumba: Like Lot's wife, you looked back but you are still baptised. The door is still wide open. Why do you and a handful of elders choose to be left behind?

Rosina: I am here with you. Am I not?

Jumba: After all that you had gone through, it was unwise, no, unforgivable for you to look back: turning around to fight your own brother and the church. Tell me, what is wrong with elders like Nuhu? They go to church and still join you at your beer parties, don't they? So, what is wrong with that?

Rosina: Mama Rosina, I did not call you here to chew my words for me. (*Pause.*) So listen. By leaving a piece of land for Aminata, Ngoya defied our laws of ages. His action was a deliberate one because it has never happened in any of our neighbouring clans. Now, I have been thinking. The stool of rule is spittle in the sand without the support of all the elders. So now I have made up my mind. If the elders want to give that piece of land to Aminata, they can do so.

Jumba: No they cannot. The final say is yours. The elders cannot give away land from one hand to another, without the consent of the headman. Have you forgotten what is normally done?

Rosina: No, I have forgotten nothing. (*Pause.*) I have been thinking. This is a battle of wits. Jumba against the rest. Tell me, I am Jumba with or without the stool of rule, am I not?

Jumba: You are, but what do you mean?

Rosina: So the soil can be handed over to Aminata without me?

Jumba: No it cannot be...

Rosina: Yes. It can. I will resign.

Rosina: Resign? My husband, which man ever proved manhood by re...

(*Jumba winces, Rosina checks herself.*) Sorry, a slip the tongue.

Jumba: This is a game of wits.

Rosina: That will be new here. Who will sit on the stool for then?

Jumba: That is what I have been thinking about, and that is I called you here. I will let the elders have their way the matter of land, but it will be me who shall have final laugh. Yes, I will outwit them at their own game.

Rosina: How exactly will you do that?

Jumba: Our family, Nyarango's family, still has two years on the stool of headmanship, not so?

Rosina: It is so.

Jumba: Since I am yet to complete my years on the stool, what responsibility is it to choose my successor?

Rosina: It is yours but in this case you...

Jumba: No, there are no buts. If I voluntarily step down from stool of rule, then it is my right to pick my successor so?

Rosina: Yes but...

Jumba: No buts! Now, when I step down, Membe will expect our family to provide a replacement, not so?

Rosina: It is so.

Jumba: Good, now look at our family, Nyarango's family, among us is fit to take over the stool of rule?

Rosina: Jumba, think of something else. This is no joke for our family. A joke? Who put that into your head? If the elders are on pleasing their goddess at my expense, I shall have choice but to resign. And if I resign, then Nyarango's family must produce my replacement. So where is the joke? The question now is, who?

(*Misunderstanding Jumba's seriousness.*) Well, if it is a game partner you want, you can count on me. I am not yet too old to play. Now, Joram is in India and Ababio is a gone ca...

Leave the crow out of it. (*Long pause.*) Now, Mama Rosina, that leaves only one other person.

Jumba:

One other person? Who?

Rosina:

You! (*This revelation is too much for Mama Rosina. She immediately bursts out laughing.*) What are you laughing at?

Rosina:

(*Still laughing.*) Me?

Jumba:

Yes, you, what are you laughing at?

Rosina:

(*Still laughing.*) I am a woman, have you forgotten that?

Jumba:

I may be a joker, but this is no time for jokes.

Rosina:

You mean, you want me, Rosina Jumba, to become Membe's headman?

Jumba:

That is so.

Rosina:

(*Still laughing.*) Oh my ribs! God, I will die to day! Aminata should hear this!

Jumba:

(*Not at all amused.*) You better take me seriously, Mama Rosina.

Rosina:

(*Fighting off a fresh bout of laughter.*) I am trying, can't you see I am trying? (*Feigning seriousness.*) What about the elders of the stool?

Jumba:

Yes, what about them? It is they who want change.

Rosina:

No, Jumba, the elders are not as crazy as you are. Tradition demands that...

Jumba:

Aah! There we are, at last! We have now come round to it, tradition! (*It is his turn to laugh.*) The cobweb shakes, the fly is caught, and the patient spider will have his meal. Tradition! What tradition Mama Rosina? "Give Aminata her piece of land." This I know is the silent wish of most of the elders. All in total disregard of our tradition. So why

should you not sit on the headman's stool for the reason? You are a woman of Membe now, aren't you?

Rosina:

(Retreating.) What, Agege! Are you a cat? No, not me.

Jumba:

Wooi, I married a fox! Jumba, you are a fox!

Agege:

I see you have come to split the firewood for me?

My simplicity has deceived them to the marrow of bones. Now I will sell them to you before they themselves to strangers. You know, it is not with reason that the bat prefers his upside down posture

Agege:

Yes, I will split now, now!

Rosina:

What is this? Jumba, I thought I knew you well?

Agege:

Maybe, and maybe not, with Nuhu.

Jumba:

Yes, as well as any woman knows a husband whom thinks crazy.

Rosina:

I see. The logs are behind the house, and the axe is at the entrance to the granary. (Agege is about to go but Jumba stops him.)

Rosina:

God, I am confused!

Jumba:

Wait a moment Agege, has Midambo talked to you this afternoon?

Jumba:

There is no time for that. Remember that we are together.

Agege:

Not me. Me I am from dance ground.

Rosina:

Be serious, Jumba. Do you really think that I...

Jumba:

Run over to his home, he has a paying job for you.

Jumba:

Yes, I do. Mama Rosina, I know that I did not make a fool.

Agege:

A paying job! Mama Rosina, firewood later! (He takes off but is soon recalled by Jumba.)

Rosina:

But can you not look beyond the stool? What will Jumba said about you? They will write books and say, "Jumba was the first headman of Membe to leave his stool to a woman."

Agege:

Agege!

Jumba:

Of his own choice! Don't forget that. "Jumba was first headman of Membe to leave his stool to a woman of his own choice."

Agege:

Headman!

Jumba:

Of his own choice! Don't forget that. "Jumba was first headman of Membe to leave his stool to a woman of his own choice."

Agege:

What is the hurry for?

Jumba:

Of his own choice! Don't forget that. "Jumba was first headman of Membe to leave his stool to a woman of his own choice."

Agege:

Oh, I see. Hurry, hurry has no blessings!

Rosina:

A real fox! I married a fox!

Rosina:

Take this bed and place it under that shade for me. (Points to a shade off stage. Agege takes off the bed.)

Jumba:

It is all in the blood, only mine will be more sensitive than that nonsense of the chicken soup. All in the of change.

Rosina:

Sometimes I wonder where he and Mbaluto get their energy from.

Rosina:

(Moving closer to him with genuine admiration.) know I don't believe this?

Jumba:

Those two frighten me. It is impossible to know what to expect of them. Just a thought.

Jumba:

Simplicity can work miracles, it is my bait, so let me bite. (Agege enters to find them very close to each other. For a little while, he just stands there, embarrassed. Finally he decides to alert them by coughing loudly.)

Rosina:

Headman? No, it doesn't sound right.

Rosina:

(Moving closer to him with genuine admiration.) know I don't believe this?

Rosina:

Headman? No, it doesn't sound right.

Jumba:

Simplicity can work miracles, it is my bait, so let me bite. (Agege enters to find them very close to each other. For a little while, he just stands there, embarrassed. Finally he decides to alert them by coughing loudly.)

Jumba:

Headman?

Rosina:

(Moving closer to him with genuine admiration.) know I don't believe this?

Rosina:

Yes, Headman.

Jumba:

Simplicity can work miracles, it is my bait, so let me bite. (Agege enters to find them very close to each other. For a little while, he just stands there, embarrassed. Finally he decides to alert them by coughing loudly.)

Rosina:

Headman, headwoman. Yes, headwoman.

Rosina:

(Moving closer to him with genuine admiration.) know I don't believe this?

Rosina:

Headman, headwoman. Yes, headwoman.

Jumba:

Simplicity can work miracles, it is my bait, so let me bite. (Agege enters to find them very close to each other. For a little while, he just stands there, embarrassed. Finally he decides to alert them by coughing loudly.)

Rosina:

Headman? No, it doesn't sound right.

PART TWO

Scene Two

(The Announcement)

A footpath between Jumba's home and the village playground. Drumming and some singing can be heard from the direction of the playground, which is to the left of Jumba's home. Agege enters blowing at his whistle in preparation for his announcement. He addresses the villagers from various positions in the auditorium.

Agege: Come one, come all, tomorrow is big day! Come one, come all Membe is happy village! (*Blows the whistle.*)

Come one, come all, big day is here! Come one, come all, new headman is calling. (*He breaks into the Aminata song and dances vigorously for a little while before he blows the whistle.*) Come one, come all, tomorrow is big day! Come one, come all Membe is happy village! (*Blows the whistle.*) Come one, come all, big day is here! Come one, come all, new headman is calling! (*Suddenly, he remembers the uniform he is wearing.*) Oh, I have swallowed saliva and forgotten! (*Pointing to the uniform.*) You see, change is like rest. Different Agege is like rest also! That is me now, senior man! You see, in past time, they call me village idiot, grave digger, and many other. They call me many, I tell you. But now, shame on their face! Now me, I am information officer of village with uniform. No joke at all, at all. I tell people, go! I tell people, come! (*Points at the initials on his uniform.*) You see this? I. O. It mean, information officer. But today, after rehearsal for hand over tomorrow, I go get thread and I go add, V, information officer of village! No joke at all, at all. Title from Mama Rosina herself, new village head from tomorrow. Today is only rehearsal. (*Blows the*

Jumba:

Why not? Alright, I have got it. Headperson!

Rosina:

Yes, headperson. No, no, no, village-head is better

Jumba:

As you like it. Village-head. (*Fade lights.*)

whistle.) Come one, come all, village of Membe is ready
(*He repeats his antics as he sings the Aminata song and is about to exit when he meets Nuhu, Ndururu and Lorna the dance choreographer.*) Hey teacher, that Aminata song is great song, shake me. (*Extends his hand to her. She shakes it.*) Congrats!

Lorna: Thank you.

Nuhu: Agege, are the people arriving for the rehearsal?

Agege: Yes, one by one.

Nuhu: Good. Blow your whistle and let the rest know that the rehearsal will begin soon. (*Agege bows then takes off blowing the whistle. Nuhu turns to Lorna.*) Yes, you wanted to know when to bring in the dancers. Now you dancers will lead the headman's family in. The rest of the people will have sat in their respective positions; it was the case yesterday.

Lorna: What about the stool-handing over song? When do the dancers join in the headman's song?

Nuhu: When the headman starts his song, your dancers should join in immediately. Ndururu, not so?

Ndururu: It is so.

Lorna: Thank you. Let me go and prepare them. (*She exits.*)

Ndururu: (*In confidence.*) You know I still don't believe all this Jumba of all our men, handing over the headmanship to a woman!

Nuhu: Well, it is happening. You know, at first, we saw it as a big joke, a kind of game. So to tease him a little, we decided to partner him. When I was asked for my opinion, I feigned seriousness and said there was nothing wrong with Mama Rosina taking over the stool of rule. Feigning seriousness too, the other elders nodded their heads in agreement with me. All along we were watching the limits of his face. We waited for the headman to change his mind, but, he seemed quite pleased with the decision

Now our hands are tied. Our only consolation is that with the coming of the new church and government, our stool of rule is no longer what it used to be. It is more there in name. So it is of no real consequence who sits on it. The heavier matter is the matter of Aminata's soil.

Ndururu: But a woman! I don't trust a woman in such a position. She will urinate on our heads.

Nuhu: Mama Rosina will be alright. For several years now, she has been the lioness behind the lion's roar. She may even be behind Jumba's decision to quit so that Aminata may get her soil.

Ndururu: But if it is true that Ababio has decided to boycott the handing over ceremony, who will pass on the soil from the headman to Aminata?

Nuhu: We have thought about that. All we need is a male member of Nyarango's family. Now in the absence of Ababio and Joram, Mbaluto will pass the soil from the headman to Aminata.

Ndururu: Mbaluto? What sort of joke is this?

Nuhu: Fear not Ndururu, all will be well. Come let us be off, we do not have much time. (*They exeunt.*)



PART TWO

Scene Three

(The handover)

This is a rehearsal of the handing over ceremony, scheduled to take place at the village playground the following day. The action takes place in the space between Jumba's hut and the main family house. Quite a few people are already seated, conversing in low tones. Nuhu who is the master of ceremony is busy organising seating arrangements. A group of village elders arrives and Nuhu welcomes them.

Nuhu: Elders of the stool, I greet you!

Elders: We return your greetings, son of Rabala.

Nuhu: Come this way, your stools are cold. *(He leads them to their seats. One or two latecomers enter and take their positions. Nuhu now prepares the crowd to receive the headman's family.)*

Membe Yoooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Nuhu: Membe Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooooo! *(A loud roar of thunder is heard, and all eyes look up the sky.)*

Nuhu: Yes, dark clouds above. That means we have to be much faster than we were yesterday. The coming storm should find us in our various homes. Prepare then to receive the headman's family. *(Nuhu turns to Abade, the oldest man alive in Membe, and bows. Abade stands up and begins a chant in Kinembe. As Abade chants, Nuhu warns the crowd.)*

Crowd: Yooooo!

Nuhu: Membe Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooooo! *(Enter Agege, dancing vigorously just ahead*

Mama Rosina, Jumba, Aminata and Mbaluto. Mbaluto, of course, is quite uncomfortable in this arrangement. Agege carries Membe's traditional stool of rule. After a little while, Agege places the stool at the feet of the chanting Abade. Nuhu shows the Jumba family their seats as the dancers dance briefly to the delight of the crowd. Abade concludes his chant and sits down. Agege remembers something and exits fast. Nuhu signals the dancers to stop.)

Nuhu: Thank you, I am sure the ones who left us have seen and are happy with you young people. The dust you raised with your feet carried our minds to our own days of youth. Abade, it is time for your blessings. *(Abade stands up and moves unsteadily forward, helped by Nuhu. He leads the gathering in prayer.)*

Abade: Let us face the soil that our forefathers left for us.

(The people bow down in prayer.) You who went to the East and West,

You who went to the North and to the South

With bowed heads, we salute you all!

Crowd: We salute you all! *(At this point, Abade prays in Kinembe, with the crowd responding appropriately, at suitable intervals. The impression created is that Abade is invoking the good spirits to come to Membe, first from the East, then the West, the North and finally from the South. He concludes the prayer in English.)*

Abade: Yes, when the lizard loses its tail.

Does it not grow another?

Crowd: It does.

Abade: The same is true of Membe's stool of rule. When one buttock stands up from it, another one sits on it. Membe

Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Abade: Membe Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Abade: If my words have entered your ears, say Yeeei!

Crowd: (*Softly.*) Yeeei!

Abade: Say Yeeeee!

Crowd: Yeeeee!

Abade: My blessings to you!

Crowd: And to you.

Nuhu: Thank you, may you be blessed with life upon life. (*He helps the old man to his original position.*) Membe Yooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Nuhu: Membe Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooo!

Nuhu: Last night, we danced well together.

In honour of Jumba, the old bearer of Membe's stool of rule.

Crowd: Yaaa!

Nuhu: Tonight, we shall dance again,

In honour of Mamma Rosina, the new bearer of That same stool of rule.

Crowd: Yaaa!

Nuhu: And that is why we are gathered here now,

To witness the change of hands

Of our stool of rule.

And as you all know,

When the stool of rule changes hands,

Its new bearer must then perform

A single official function

Before the traditional run through the village.

Membe Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Nuhu: Abade, your duty. (*Abade steps forward, picks up the*

stool of rule, spins on it three times before handing it over to Jumba, in total silence. As soon as Jumba receives the stool he immediately breaks into song and other voices join in. Only Jumba dances to the song. The dance comes to an abrupt end when Jumba attempts to thrust the stool into Mamma Rosina's lap. Mamma Rosina declines the offer, and instead, breaks into her own song. The dance ends suddenly when she grabs the stool from Jumba's hands. The crowd cheers wildly. Mamma Rosina sits on the stool of rule. Jumba bows respectfully and returns to his own seat. The dancers take to the floor and dance vigorously until they are stopped by the new Village Head.)

Rosina: Membe Yooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Rosina: Membe Yooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Do you say I am the Village Head?

Rosina: Yaaa!

And will you listen when I say I have words for your ears?

Crowd: Yaaa!

Listen then, for I have words for your ears. Membe Yooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Rosina: Membe Yooooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Before the traditional run through Membe's foot paths, it is the wish of all that I perform one official function to mark my possession of Membe's stool of rule. Membe

Yooo!

Crowd: Yooo!

Rosina: Yooo!

Many a time have we been reminded that a dying man's words are sacred.

They shall not be slighted.

Now, Pastor Ngoya had words for his daughter, Aminata, before he died and joined those who went before him. For nights and days, many have grumbled over this matter.

But today, the elders of Membe's stool of rule say, a dying man's words are sacred.

They shall not be slighted.

Membe Yoooo!

Crowd: Yooo!

Rosina: Membe Yoooo!

Crowd: Yooo!

Rosina: Will you respect the stool and hear Aminata for a while?

Crowd: Yaaa!

Rosina: Aminata, greet those who gave birth to you.

Aminata: Membe Yoooo!

Crowd: Yoooooo!

Aminata: Membe Yoooo!

Crowd: Yooooo!

Aminata: Permit me to say a few words before I go back to my husband and my children.

I am a married woman, therefore I belong to the people of my husband's village.

However, my umbilical cord was buried here, according to Membe's ways of ages.

My mother and my father are buried here too.

Is it right then that I should forever

Forget the source of my life?

Crowd: Noooo!

Aminata: I thank you all.

I thank my uncle and his team of elders.

They have saved us many anxious moments.

And when all is over, you shall see that mine is not a heart of stone, for I will own nothing here.

Membe yoooooo!

Yooooo!

Crowd: My thanks to you all.

Aminata: Those are words from the lips of a daughter of Membe.

Rosina: Do you agree that Aminata should get her gift of soil?

Crowd: Yaaa!

Rosina: Thank you. Abade, the soil. *(Abade gets the container of soil, spits three times, in it, and hands it over to Mama Rosina. Mama Rosina, using sign language, calls Mbaluto to step forward.)*

Aminata, step forward.
In accordance with our way or ages, I hand over this soil to you, through the hands of Mbaluto. Your agemate and brother.

A gift from your late father. *(She hands the soil container to Mbaluto and signals to him to hand it over to Aminata. Before Mbaluto hands over the container, Agege bursts in, panic-stricken. The gathering is dumb-founded. Jumba quickly steps forward and shakes Agege vigorously, trying to extract information from him.)*

Jumba: What is it? Agege! Agege! Control yourself. What is the matter?

Agege: *(Sobbing uncontrollably.)* It is Ababio!

Jumba: Ababio?

Agege: Yes.

Jumba: What has the devil done to him?

Agege: Nothing! He is dead! Ababio is dead!

Jumba: Dead?

Agege: Yes, hanging! With rope round neck. Ababio is dead!

Junba:

(The soil container falls from Mbaluto's hands and breaks, scattering the soil all over. Unable to stand, Aminata sinks to her knees. The rest of the crowd freezes.)
It is not yet too late to learn, yet what have we done?
What have we done? (*Lights fade slowly.*)

THE END

Glossary

- Aminata witu, tunakupenda!*: Our Aminata we love you!
Aminata, Aminata, nguyio!: Aminata, Aminata, here she comes!
Aminata witu, unakaribishwa!: Our Aminata we welcome you!
Aminataa, Aminata wooye!: Aminataa, hail Aminata!
Aii (Kiswahili): That.
Banyako: A corruption of "pioneer corps".
Basi (Swahili): Enough.
Ching / Chang'aa: Nubian gin, brewed and sold illicitly.
Dagitari: A corruption of Kiswahili "Daktari" (Doctor).
Degreeed (Colloquial): A person with a degree.
Faira: Minimum measurement for chang'aa.
Ghasia (Swahili): Rubbish.
Hawa (Swahili): Eve, as in Adam and Eve.
Ibarasa (Luhya): A meeting of elders.
Koroga (Swahili): Stir so as to mix up.
Mugumo: Type of a tropical tree.
Musyi gwa nzogu: Type of medicinal herb.
Pernanganet (malapropism): Permanent.
Tunakupenda: We love you.
Unakaribishwa: You are welcome.
Witu (Luhya): Ours.